Short Stories.

No. 739.] Week ending February 28, 1903. [Price One Penny.

From his hiding place behind the bushes he saw her throw a packet into the lake, causing the water to ripple. What could that packet contain?

(A Dramatic Incident from the Story, "Woman's Way Wins." See inside.)

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SHORT STORIES

No. 739.] [ONE PENNY.

For the Week Ending February 28th, 1903.

WOMAN'S WIT WINS.

The Story of the Righting of a Wrong.

Containing the Incident Shown on the Cover.

"Ah! I want you, Arnold," said the chief, a man with iron grey hair and military moustache, addressing the younger man, who had just entered the room in obedience to a summons. "I've got something special on for you!"

"Very good, sir!" responded Richard Arnold. His voice was brisk enough, but there was a somewhat jaded appearance about the intelligent face, and the black eyes were not so keen-looking as usual.

The chief of the detective department fixed his glittering eyes on the newcomer and scrutinised him sharply before proceeding.

"You've been working too hard lately, Arnold! That Rugeley case has taken something out of you, but you scored over it, by Jove! Well, having gained some points over a notorious case, you can afford to take a quiet country job. That will give you the rest you badly need. Moreover, you're just the man for it! Sit down and I'll explain!"

Arnold did as he was bidden. He scarcely relished the country job; he was ambitious, and this quiet affair suggested that he would vegetate for a time instead of making further progress. However, he did need a rest. He listened patiently to his chief's remarks, as the latter unfolded so much as he knew of a story which had far more dramatic incident in it than either of the two men imagined.

"About a year ago," said the chief, "a man named Moulton, aged about twenty-six, was arrested for defrauding a bank. It was done by means of bills of acceptance, something after the manner of the great Bank of England robberies a quarter of a century ago. One almost wonders how such things can be done, but recent exposures show that our banking system is a long way from being perfect.

"Moulton was the chief of a small party apparently. At any rate, there was at least one other, but no clue could be obtained to the other rascal. Moulton would not utter a word. At the trial a good deal of evidence was forthcoming against him; the public was surprised, for he had a good character.

"That evidence was gathered by means of anonymous letters sent to the police, although the public didn't know that. The prisoner himself showed signs of surprise, and two or three times he seemed to be on the point of contradicting the police evidence, but checked himself. He had pleaded 'Guilty,' and he really courted conviction. He was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

"Now, when he was supposed to be either mentally contradicting, or on the point of openly contradicting, the evidence, it was because his lips moved as if speaking. Some time afterwards, a man came to me and said that Moulton had really been conversing with someone in the court by means of lip language, just as the deaf read your conversation by the movements of your lips. He was not sure, but he firmly believed that it was so, and that Moulton had concluded with the words 'help me to escape.' I smiled at the notion and dismissed the man, but I now find that there is something in it.

"There was very little chance of escape till Moulton got into the Kentish prison, but there appears to be a chance of doing it from that place of incarceration. Well, he has been there for two months, and my friend, the Governor, has got hold of a rumour and wants me to assist him. That is where you come in, Arnold."

Arnold bowed and waited.

"Someone—it may be a man or a woman, probably the latter—is trying to help Moulton to escape. That is the supposition, you understand. This someone is staying in one of the country houses of the district. The only one in which visitors are staying at present is that of Sir Arthur Boyce.

"The Governor thinks that some latitude in the way of supervision may be given to Moulton, and a detective might watch Sir Arthur's visitors. The result should be that we get the accomplice, who is possibly trying to assist Moulton to escape. It is noteworthy that twice lately Sir Arthur has obtained permission for a small party to go over the prison.

"You are a young man, Arnold, well-educated; in fact a gentleman, and you could act the part of a visitor to perfection. My friend has obtained for you an invitation from Sir Arthur, and you will appear as Mr. Wilfrid Burnley.

"Sir Arthur was not keen about it at first, as he dislikes the idea of his guests being watched; but the Governor overcame those scruples by pointing out that it did not matter to honest men if they were watched, and that if there were any rogues among his company he would be well rid of them. So it is settled, and you go down at once."

Arnold made some inquiries and received further necessary instructions; he then bowed himself out and made preparations for carrying out what appeared to be a humdrum sort of task, but which was not to be so tame in reality.

It was an exceedingly pleasant company which Sir Arthur Boyce had gathered about him at his fine old mansion, Elm House, and Mr. Burnley quickly entered into the gay spirit that predominated.

Sir Arthur and Lady Boyce were middle-aged; they had both climbed the hill to fifty and were beginning the descent that leads to old age, but they were as full of go and fun as their son and daughter.

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There were more than a dozen guests, all young, and every one of the fine summer days was enjoyed to the fullest extent. As soon as one guest was due to depart another arrived, and so the continuity of amusement was maintained.

Burnley was a good oarsman, cyclist and tennis player; he could talk well and act as cavalier to the ladies as well as any man there; so he was an acquisition. Occasionally he sighed as he reflected that his life had opened in a manner that promised this kind of life for him, but unfortunate speculation by his father had forced him to earn his own living, and influence, added to natural ability, had made a detective of him.

Burnley's heart was as susceptible as that of most men of his age, and he would have quickly lost it to one of the feminine guests had he not steeled himself against the danger. Burnley had to admit reluctantly that Miss Millie Hartford did not blush or show any sign of trepidation in his presence; yet he reflected that—— But no, he had his duty to perform!

Burnley kept on the look-out for the possible accomplice of Moulton, but he was fain to admit, after the second day, that he was no nearer than he had been when he arrived. He had noted several facts, notably that Mr. Gerald Wynter was in love with Miss Hartford and that she did not appear to be averse to his attentions, although she did not wait for him to accompany her here, there, and everywhere. "As I should if I had the chance!" murmured the detective.

"What do you think?" asked Sir Arthur anxiously.

"It looks as if a mistake had been made, Sir Arthur!" replied Burnley. "However, time will show!"

"I hope to goodness it won't!" breathed the Baronet fervently. "Whatever Mabel—I mean Lady Boyce—would say if she knew that I had agreed to this, I daren't think! None of my family is aware of this business!"

Burnley could hardly repress a smile at the Baronet's anxiety, but he replied cheerily and dismissed the subject.

Burnley found it inadvisable to join any particular excursion party or otherwise "tie himself up" (as he expressed it) to any group; he was bound to play a game here or take a walk there with other members of the house-party occasionally, but it was necessary for him to remain free and keep a sharp eye on all.

He was down betimes in the morning, scrutinising letters whenever he had an opportunity, and also watching the letters that were dispatched from the house. At the end of the fourth day he felt that he was on the wrong tack, but he knew that he must keep on till orders came from the chief, to whom he reported every day.

After that, he allowed himself to follow his own inclination rather more, and that took him to Miss Millie Hartford's side. She was full of quiet dignity, less gay than the others—"less frivolous," Burnley called it—and her conversation was more serious.

She was witty and could join in outdoor sports with the rest; in short, a welcome addition to any house-party and yet superior to most of her fellow-guests. It was the kind of nature and temperament that attracted Burnley, who bit his moustache when Wynter was by Miss Hartford's side.

It was during a lag in the general conversation one evening that Burnley remarked, lazily, but with his keen eyes on the assembled company:

"I heard that a prisoner had escaped."

"Good gracious!" ejaculated Sir Arthur. "You don't mean to say——"

He nearly betrayed himself. Several others chimed in.

"Really! I don't believe it!" "How interesting!" "I'm positive it is not true!"

"That would be exciting!" yawned Gerald Wynter, but his face was pale.

Miss Hartford raised her eyes from a book to meet Burnley's fixed upon her.

"Do you think it possible, Mr. Burnley?" she asked tranquilly. "I scarcely think so!"

He was looking at her with admiration which he could not repress; but she met his gaze with unruffled serenity.

"Oh! I have not gone into possibilities, Miss Hartford. I merely repeat a rumour."

His penetrating eyes were upon her face; she met them defiantly.

"Would you be afraid if it were true?" she asked with the slightest touch of sarcasm in her voice.

"Not if you were near!" he retorted. "I imagine that you would be deterred by very few things!"

They looked steadfastly at one another while the rest of the party laughed and echoed approval. The remark had sprung spontaneously to Burnley's lips and he had no ulterior motive in saying what he did; but he read in her bright orbs a *something* which thrilled him inwardly.

"Oh, Miss Hartford has been to prison, you know!" drawled one young lady. "As a visitor, of course!"

This sally provoked more mirth; Miss Hartford joined in the laugh, turning to the speaker, but that laugh from her lips sounded harsh to Burnley.

"Heavens! Could it be this woman?" he thought, and a confusion arose within his mind which rendered coherence of ideas impossible for a time. His ruse about the escape of a prisoner had succeeded in providing him with some clue.

His suspicions had been aroused by Gerald Wynter's pallor, but his detective intuition told him that this woman was at least implicated, if not the principal agent. The notion was detestable; he could not bring himself to believe that she was his quarry.

She was the kind of woman who would dare anything for a lover or for a friend to whom she had pledged herself; but, on the other hand, he was convinced that she would wash her hands of anyone convicted of a base action, and this Moulton had pleaded "Guilty!" to a charge of fraud and forgery! It was incomprehensible; his detective instinct must be at fault!

From that moment his feelings towards her were contradictory; he distrusted her, yet he felt that he was doing her an injustice; he tried to keep from the spell of her beauty and charming ways, but he was drawn nearer to her! He was becoming more and more in love with her, and all the while he knew that he should fight against this love.

As for Miss Hartford, after the little passage of words between them she became more affable than ever, and appeared to take a delight in his society. Gerald Wynter scowled at him, for he had less opportunity than before of accompanying Miss Hartford. Burnley returned the scowls with interest, and the two men developed a cordial hatred of each other.

The preference shown by Miss Hartford and Mr. Burnley for their mutual society developed so marked a character during the next two or three days that it formed the subject of whispered comment. They were partners in the games, they walked together during their excursions, they remained by one another's side in everything.

In that time Burnley had fallen completely in love with Millie Hartford, and was upon the point of making some kind of a proposal, when his mind cleared, and he remembered that he was wooing her under false pretences—she did not know his real social position—and he was forgetting his duty! The reflections brought him to an abrupt stop, and he set himself deliberately to spy on the doings of Gerald Wynter and Millie Hartford.

"They are the only two here who would do it, and it must be the man! Still, I'll watch both, although I hate the idea!"

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A slight sprain of the foot would serve to release him from attendance on Miss Hartford without causing suspicion, and this was the device he adopted. His window was very convenient for his purpose; it had been especially chosen, and he used it.

On the following morning he saw Millie Hartford and Gerald Wynter together, and he crept out to shadow one or both. That day brought him no nearer the truth; the two suspects were not together long, and, although he contrived to keep both in view tolerably well, he discovered nothing.

On the next day he did the same, and still without result. It was rather a risky proceeding, because he was supposed to be getting over the sprain, and if he were found by any member of the house-party at any considerable distance from the house, he would be dubbed a fraud. He decided that on the following morning his foot should be well, but that he would not appear till the others had scattered.

He carried out this plan, taking breakfast in his room and slipping out in time to shadow Millie Hartford. To prevent immediate recognition he put on a false beard.

He saw her walking in the direction of the piece of water in one corner of the estate; she looked back occasionally, and he had to be careful. However, he had not been a detective without learning how to shadow his prey, and he flattered himself that he could manage this woman. There was something suspicious in her manner, and this fact struck chilly upon his heart.

He had learnt the topography of the estate, and he saw a chance of getting in front of her by a short cut. He was convinced that she was making for the water. This awkward path would take him there first, and he could get to the opposite side, where it would be easy to secure a hiding place from which to observe her movements.

Stepping out briskly, but lightly and cautiously, stopping now and then to get a glimpse of his victim, he reached the other side and took up a position favourable for the object he had in view.

He felt just a trifle excited as he saw her approaching the water with an air that indicated her intention to do something when she reached it. This was no casual excursion; it had a object. If the young detective had been engaged in any other case, he would have been as cool as a cucumber, but the circumstances were no longer ordinary. He loved her!

He saw her give a last quick look round, then raise her arm. In his eagerness to see what it was that she was about to throw from her, as the motion indicated, he exposed himself for a moment, but it was too late.

The splash sounded before he could see, and he could only judge by the size of the ripples that it was an object of fair proportions, not merely a stone or anything so trivial in dimensions.

Millie Hartford turned her back on the water at once, and began to retrace her steps at a good pace.

The young detective, cold at heart, deliberated for a few moments whether he should wait and plunge in after the mysterious object or follow Millie. He decided on the latter course; the water was deep enough to reach his shoulders, and it would be better to wait till night before fishing up what Miss Hartford had thrown away.

"It's no use taking it to heart!" he muttered savagely. "If the girl is a bad one, I don't want her! Yet—it's hard to be so disappointed in one of the opposite sex! Anyhow, I'll stick on her track now and go through with it!"

He soon caught up his lost ground, and he had reason to congratulate himself on deciding to follow her.

She made a long detour to another part of the estate, but she resumed the cautious look round when she approached the part where others were likely to be. Apparently she was satisfied, for she suddenly sped along a narrow path and disappeared.

Not to be outwitted, Burnley slipped along after her till he came within earshot of a shady bower especially erected for a quiet talk. As quietly as a mouse he glided up to the back of this bower, and his heart gave a bound as he heard her voice. She was speaking in suppressed tones, but passionately.

"I tell you, I cannot act as your tool any more," she said. "I have done as you have bidden me implicitly; but this Burnley suspects me, and it will be useless to expect success."

Burnley opened his eyes in amazement. To whom was she talking? And how had she guessed that he was dogging her movements?

"She's cleverer than I gave her credit for!" he said to himself, at the same time removing the beard.

He listened for the other to speak, but the voice was so low that he could catch nothing, much to his annoyance.

"I don't care a rap whether this man gets out or not!" was the next remark overheard by Burnley, and it was Millie Hartford who uttered it. There was a pause and some more inaudible talk. Then Millie spoke again.

"Of course, I'll help, for your sake, Ger—— I suggest this; I'll keep Burnley in hand; he's fond of me, and I rather like him; he's a good sort, but he's a detective! Well, I'll keep him in hand and you must do the work.

"We must change parts in this play now; if I continue to play the chief part, the game is over, for Burnley will trap me and spoil all. I'm so afraid that he will drop on me that I've just thrown into the water the wig and other things to make up the original disguise for M—— to get away in!"

The listener smiled with pleasure. He was not so simple as Millie Hartford imagined! It was Gerald Wynter to whom she was talking evidently.

"I must shadow him and yet do what I can to be agreeable to Miss Hartford!" murmured Burnley. "The conversation appears to be over. I'll saunter round to the entrance of this bower and see them both, just to make sure it is Wynter."

He carried out this intention so far as he could, but he was met at the top of the path leading to the bower by Miss Hartford, who at once held out her hand with an exclamation of pleasure.

"I'm so glad you are about again, Mr. Burnley!" she cried. "I hope the sprain is well?"

"Quite, thank you, Miss Hartford!" he replied, with just as much frankness. "Shall we go into the bower for a moment?"

"Oh, no!" she cried hastily. "I've been in there and it is full of horrid earwigs and things!"

The young detective smiled; he understood, but he agreed and they sauntered away.

Burnley's game was difficult now, but he managed to play it well. He kept a strict watch on Wynter, but he contrived to spend a little time with Millie Hartford—not much, though. His excuse to her was that he had something to study, and he could do this better while roaming about alone. He did not forget to fish up the packet, and found that it really did contain a wig, beard, and other small articles, for disguising the face and appearance of the head.

He received a message from headquarters to the effect that some informer had given intelligence that it was most probably a woman who was trying to effect the escape, but Burnley chuckled.

"That's a good move on their part!" he said softly. "They think that this will make me stick to Miss Hartford, and so Wynter will do the trick. It is the

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hange of parts! The information comes from Wickham, eh?. Not very far from here!"

Gerald Wynter and Millie Hartford were seen together from time to time by the young detective, and the first-named took long walks every day.

Burnley kept on his track, but nothing transpired till another week had passed and the duration of his stay at Elm House had already exceeded its original limit. Wynter and Miss Hartford were the only two remaining of the party as constituted when he had arrived.

Now, to tell what passed at the end of that week, we must leave Burnley and follow Gerald Wynter. Burnley had lost sight of him for a time, and Wynter was strolling along in the direction of the railway station.

It was a secluded, winding lane through which he was walking when he saw in front of him a figure which he recognised as that of Millie. She was walking by the side of a bent old woman, who was leaning on her arm. Hurrying forward, he passed in front of them and turned.

"Whoever would have expected to see you here, Miss Hartford!" he cried. "Are you helping this old lady to the station?"

Millie Hartford's face paled, but she forced a smile.

"I always like to help old persons!" she said gently.

Her companion's head bent lower; the old lady trembled.

"Allow me to help also!" said Gerald courteously.

He held out his arm, but the next instant the bent figure straightened and a strong masculine voice cried:

"You double-dyed traitor! You scoundrel! You robbed me of my liberty, my good name, my love!"

"Moulton!" screamed Wynter, starting back in alarm.

The disguised convict flew at him and gripped him by the throat.

"You dog!" he hissed. "It is my turn now! I pleaded 'Guilty,' and suffered degradation in your stead because I thought that the girl I loved had asked me to do it for her sake, as she loved you! I sacrificed myself for love, only to find that it was your diabolical plotting! You cur!"

"Oh, Syd, don't lose time!" implored Millie, catching the supposed old woman by the arm. "Fly, fly, or you will be caught! The train will be gone!"

Sydney Moulton, the escaped convict, struck Wynter a violent blow with his clenched fist, stunning him.

"He will be safe for a time!" cried Moulton. "Kiss me, Millie!"

Millie uttered a scream.

"Run, run! Here comes the detective I spoke of."

She clasped her hands in alarm. Moulton stood irresolute, till Millie repeated her intreaty. "Do not fear for me!" she added.

Then Moulton, seeing capture probable if he stayed, held up his short skirts with both hands and sped along like the wind, presenting the ridiculous spectacle of an old woman running like an athlete. In a moment he was out of sight round a bend, while Millie remained to face Burnley, whose quick brain had grasped the truth.

"Stop, Mr. Burnley, I beseech you!" she cried, as the young detective ran up. He tried to avoid her, but she was quick and caught him in her outstretched arms.

"Mr. Burnley, for my sake, do not send an innocent man back to prison!"

The young fellow yielded; he felt that her last words were true. Moulton was innocent.

"Let me explain!" she cried. With passionate earnestness that was almost too terrible to witness, she told her story, freely giving vent to her feelings. "I love Sydney Moulton. He befriended Mr. Wynter, who had been fortunate enough to save Sydney's life when he was seized with cramp while swimming. Wynter took advantage of this to ask all kinds of help and favours, and he laid his plans in such a way that Sydney was seemingly inculpated in Wynter's frauds. Appearances were against Sydney. I had been ill, and the shock made me worse; I was unconscious for days, on and off, and Sydney was tried and condemned quickly, for he pleaded 'Guilty,' and the assizes were at hand.

"When I recovered I was horrified to hear that he had said he was guilty. I went to him at the prison, on the first visiting day, and he told me why he had done it.

"He had received a letter from me, asking him, by his love for me, to save Wynter, whom I loved to distraction! Oh, Mr. Burnley, I cannot tell you the infamy of it. Wynter told him lies upon lies; told him that I could not face him, as I was bound heart and soul to him—Wynter!

"Sydney loved me madly, and he sacrificed himself for me, to save the man he thought I loved, although it nearly broke his heart to learn that I did not love *him* after all! Wynter promised to help him to escape, but he never carried out the intention; he did not want to.

"When Sydney heard the truth from me, it was too late to withdraw the plea, and we felt that Wynter had purposely obtained false evidence. Sydney got off lightly, all things considered. I determined to scheme for his escape, and then go to him across the sea. I pretended to lend a favourable ear to Wynter's suit for my own ends.

"I found to my horror that you had come to spy on me, and I played my cards accordingly. Please forgive me, Mr. Burnley! I hoodwinked you. I helped you to fall in love with me. I threw that packet into the water expressly to deceive you, for I knew you were looking—I enticed you to look.

"I had no one with me in the bower; it was a bogus conversation! So I succeeded in throwing you off the scent, and I got Sydney out. During my inspection of the prison I saw him and handed him a note of my plan. *You* nearly upset it, but Sydney could not get his opportunity so soon as we hoped, which proved fortunate!

"Now, Mr. Burnley, I am in your hands. If you give me up to justice, Sydney and I must wait still longer before we meet. *He* will be safe, for the train is gone and I know he caught it, for I saw a handkerchief waving from a window as it went by over there."

"Who sent the anonymous letter from Wickham a week ago?" asked the detective suddenly.

"Not I! About what?"

"Then it was this precious rascal!" cried the young man, pointing to the still unconscious Wynter. "He was giving you away! Look here, Miss Hartford! I've been beaten by a woman's wit and through yielding to love! It won't increase my reputation, and I suppose it's my duty to split, but I won't. But you had better go, or it may leak out. I can understand that Wynter won't say anything, for it might bring him into the grip of justice!"

"Thank you, Mr. Burnley—is that really your name? Richard Arnold? Thank you"—as he handed her a card. "I will let you know some day."

And she was gone.

"There will be a scandal at the house. What will Sir Arthur think? And what about me? H'm! I must make a show!"

He walked away just as Wynter was opening his eyes. When near the end of the lane, the detective deliberately ran at a tree trunk with lowered head and fell unconscious. He was found by the search party, who understood that he had been knocked insensible by the convict, after a struggle.

George Day.

Effie: "Jack, papa said we must not see each other any more." Jack: "Indeed! Then I will turn the gas out."

"What part am I to take?" said Chappie. "You are to be the heroine's father," replied the stage manager. "What does he do?" "He dies ten years before the curtain rises on the first act."

Mrs. Jackson: "Did you see Mrs. Brown's collection of rare old china?" Jackson: "Yes; her family must have been quite poor." Mrs. Jackson: "Nonsense; why do you think so?" Jackson: "Well, if they had been able to keep servants she never would have had that collection of rare old china."

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THE BLUNDERS OF JOHN CARSTER.

The Tale of a Lesson in Lovemaking.

"Well, I suppose this is the end of it." John Carster heaved a heavy sigh, and strode along moodily. Helen looked at him curiously and then asked:

"The end of what?"

"You know as well as I do to what I refer. To be perfectly plain, I hear it reported on very good authority that you are to marry this Monte Cristo. And that is what I mean when I say that I suppose we will not take many more walks together." He looked at her keenly.

"I suppose it is but a further exemplification of the doctrine announced by the Bible, where it says 'To him who hath, it shall be given, and to him who hath not, it shall be taken away,' and I want to add to that, 'even that which he may seem to have.'"

There was a silence for a few moments. Helen reached out and plucked at a foxglove. She did not look at him. After a few moments she said in a low voice:

"You are getting bitter, John. Don't do it. It does not help you."

"Don't you think I have cause to be bitter? A man can smile and stand a great deal more without giving evidence of his suffering, and there is still another degree of pain, which turns everything to gall. I have suffered that."

"You are very wrong to look at things that way," replied the woman. "What have you to be bitter over? You possess youth, and health, and strength, and ability—all those are priceless gifts. You are well thought of by everyone, and I see no cause for you to think your lot is hard."

"Yes, what you say is true, but I have not the great essential—money. I might be a paralytic, and just have enough sense to keep out of a lunatic asylum, and enough morals to keep from being locked up as a menace to society, but if I had money, all that would be overlooked, and I would be better thought of than I am now. As it is, I am not considered at all."

"Not considered by whom?"

"Everybody. And someone in particular whom I wish to consider me, and who has refused. I have tried everything else; I have placed myself at her feet. Love does not count."

Her face was crimson. She looked far away over the sere, brown fields, and at last said:

"Then what am I to deduce from that assertion—it isn't clear."

"You are not to deduce anything—I state it as my positive conviction that, given on the one hand a man with everything to make him desirable in the eyes of a woman, but with no money, and on the other hand a man with nothing to recommend him but money, a woman will choose the man with the money ninety-nine cases out of a hundred. That's what I mean."

"Why, John, why, John!" There was an infinity of reproach in those words.

"Yes, I mean it!" he added. "I mean every word of it. Women are essentially selfish, and they love the soft side of life. They know that money will make a soft side to anything, and therefore, they are on the side of money."

"I am sorry for you," she said simply. "I thought that you had a higher idea of women."

"Haven't I a right to be bitter?" he continued. "Haven't I every right to such ideas? If it has not been demonstrated to me, nothing has. There is nothing so convincing as personal experience, and it is from that I speak."

"I have known you a long time, John, and I know of no such instance in your career that you speak of. When was it?"

"You know very well to what I allude. You know that I have loved you for all these years, since we were little more than children. You know that my highest dream of earthly happiness was to some day make a home for you, where I could have you with me always. There has not been an ambition in my brain that was not caused by my wish to excel and make you proud of me.

"The rest of the world go can hang—you are my world, the all in all for me. And now, after all these years, all that counts for naught. There comes into your life a great big, beefy man,—you know little about him except that he is very wealthy, and in the course of two months he undoes what I have done, or rather in that time accomplishes what I could not accomplish in six times as many years. Is not that evidence enough? What is to be deduced from that except what I have stated?"

"I ought to be very angry with you, John. You have accused me of a wretched thing—that I would sell my life, my love, my soul, merely to provide myself with creature comforts. I don't know why I don't make you leave me, and never permit you to speak to me again, except that I realise that your anger has carried you off your feet. I realise what you say, that such a state of things is an awful blow to a man. But I do not grant that any such state exists—that is—I mean——"

"You mean what, that you are not going to marry him?" There was light and life and hope in the questioner's eyes now.

"Yes, I mean that; and that I have not intended to do so. And now let me do a little preaching to you—you have had your say, and you have said things you ought not to have said."

"It is a mistaken notion men have, that a woman wants to receive all and give nothing. True love is self-effacement, and bearing the burdens of those whom we do love, and nothing gives a woman so much pleasure as to suffer for the man she really cares for."

"Do you really mean that?" There was wonderment upon the face of the questioner.

"Yes. And there would be more women who would be glad to accept even the little in the way of wealth their sweethearts possess, if they were given the chance. Instead of going bravely to her and saying 'I have little or nothing, but I love you. I can provide enough to keep us from starving, and enough to furnish us with clothes. More than that, I do not care for, with you at my side. Will you accept that?' The men stand off and snivel about women wanting wealth. It makes me weary. It's weakness."

There was a long pause. The sun had sunk below the horizon, and the west was gorgeous with the opaline tints of the dying day. The couple stood a moment looking at the sunset. Perhaps it was the glory of the ruddy rays upon her face, or the reflection from the golden gates of the west that shone in her eyes. He paused, for a moment irresolute, and then taking her hand, looked her full in the eyes. She looked down and her face flushed.

"Helen," he said, very gently, "I have almost nothing in the way of goods or wealth, but I have a love for you that the wealth of Midas could not buy. Will you accept what I have?"

She looked up and smiled softly.

"Why didn't you say that a year or so ago? Yes, I will."

Gaston Harvey

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THE MOTH AND THE STAR.

The Story of a Revenge which Ended Happily.

THE soft light of many lamps fell on as gay, as bright a scene as could be painted.

Charming girls in dainty toilettes, a capital band and a first-class floor for dancing—Mrs. Dancesbury's ball bid fair to be a big success.

And of all the young and pretty girls here gathered not one so lovely as was Jessie Casselis, a golden-haired blonde with pink cheeks and big grey eyes, and a mouth designed, it seemed, for kisses!

Those same grey eyes were looking round the room in evident and eager expectation.

"He is not here, Nina," she said softly to a dark, pleasant-looking girl; "do you think he will come?"

"Surely, my dear. Why, if I mistake not, he is here already." She motioned to a fair, distinguished-looking man just entering the room.

"Yes—it is Cecil." Jessie's face flushed—she squeezed her friend's hand tightly. "Oh, Nina, doesn't he make the other men look *plain?*"

"Handsome is that handsome does, my dear. Cecil Warrington has the reputation of being a great flirt; mind you don't get caught, Jessie. Remember the pretty proverb about singed wings, and fly away in time."

"Nonsense," said Jessie sharply, and turned aside. But all the same a sharp pain shot through her heart at the words; it *could* not, it *should* not be that he was only *flirting*. She shook off the feeling by sheer force of will and talked, and laughed, was the gayest of the gay, flitting from one to another like a bright butterfly.

And yet, surrounded by men, besieged for dances, she could not be content. Cecil had made her promise to save all his favourite waltzes, made her promise with loving words and tender looks, but the evening was far advanced and he had not come to claim them!

Would another, to whom her thoughts went back, have so treated her? A year ago, at a ball at this very house, Guy Redmond had been her shadow, a slave to all her whims. She had been fond of him in a girlish sort of way, but nothing deeper. Nina told her she had treated him cruelly, inasmuch as he had made desperate love to her unrebuked, for the space of a year, only to be met with a refusal at the end of his wooing. But then Nina didn't know everything. Her aunt, the Hon. Mrs. Maynard, would never have allowed Jessie to make such a match. Guy had nothing but his pay, it was not possible to think of such a thing as matrimony. No, she was not to blame; and yet, and yet she could not forget the look in Guy's blue eyes when he had heard his fate.

Overwrought with excitement and disappointment, Jessie could hardly keep back the tears when at last Cecil came over to her side.

"Suppose we sit awhile in the conservatory?" he asked her. "It's terribly hot and noisy here. And I've something to say to you which can't be said in the middle of a ballroom."

He spoke so tenderly, holding her little hand in his the while, that all trace of resentment and indignation at his treatment vanished.

She went with him to the sweet-scented hot-house, finding contentment in the thought that, for a time, at least, they two would be together.

She noticed after a while that they were sitting in the same spot, under the very palm, where she had given poor Guy Redmond his *congé* a year back. She felt that she would have much preferred another seat, but notwithstanding this slight drawback, she was very happy. Cecil loved her, surely he loved her!

In the dim light his arm stole round her waist, her head drooped nearer, closer, until it found a resting place on his shoulder. "Darling," he whispered, kissing her fondly, "my own dear little girl."

"Do you love me, Jessie?" he asked her presently, and clasping her white arms round his neck, her whole soul in her eyes, she answered "Yes."

"You will hear from me to-morrow dear," he whispered, as he said "Good-bye," and the look she gave him in return was so full of tenderness that it struck her aunt, the Hon. Mrs. Maynard, as remarkable.

"Jessie," she questioned eagerly, "has Cecil Warrington proposed?"

Had he proposed? The question jarred on the girl. Of course he had, she told herself, virtually, if not in words. She hesitated a moment, and then answered quietly, "I shall hear from him to-morrow," and with that her aunt was fain to be content. Mrs. Maynard glanced approvingly at the slight figure in the corner of the carriage. Warrington was a very good match, she reflected, £10,000 a year and the chance of a title. Truly her niece had done well, and the worthy woman decided that Jessie's marriage portion should not be called a meagre one. For to her that hath more shall be given, and, inasmuch as the wife of Cecil Warrington would enjoy riches in plenty a greater supply should be at her command.

"Thank Heaven, I was firm about that good-for-nothing Redmond," reflected Mrs. Maynard. "I always swore if Jessie married a poor man I would not let her have a penny," and, swelling with complacency at such virtuous resolution, the good lady retired to bed—to dream of Jessie's future greatness.

Her niece, however, passed the night in a very different fashion. Again and again she went over every incident of that eventful evening. How lucky that she had worn her new white dress; he liked white! Had he not told her so a dozen times? "I'm not good enough for you, my darling," she murmured fondly, gazing with soft grey eyes into the fire.

She sat and thought until the sun rose behind the murky cloud of smoke that bounded the horizon, till its first beams touched the chimney tops with gold, and set the sparrows

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twittering with delight. She threw the window open and looked out. The cool morning air, as yet untainted by London's dust and grime, fell like a caress upon her cheek, and with a smile curving her warm red lips, she dropped her head upon the window-sill and fell asleep.

It was some hours later when she awoke with a start, to find her maid regarding her with mild astonishment, while a terrible headache bore evidence to the fact that a window-sill is not the most refreshing place to take a nap.

In place of the bright sunshine of the early morning, the air was heavy with a thick yellow fog, and her spirits seemed to have grown dull in sympathy.

"A letter for you, miss."

A letter—one look was enough—it was from him! With eager, trembling hands she broke the seal, how good of him to write so soon. But, as she read, the flush upon her face changed to a deadly whiteness, her eyes grew strained and hard, the fair young face seemed to have aged by years.

"Some years ago," the letter ran, "Guy Redmond and I were boys at school together, and the friendship then commenced has lasted until now. When I tell you that the last time I saw my friend he was a wreck both in mind and body, his health gone, his prospects blighted, his career in the Army inevitably drawing to a close, when, I say, I tell you that I learnt the name of the woman whose heartless trifling had brought him to this pass—you will understand why I have striven to win your love, you will comprehend the delight experienced at my complete success, and you will, I trust, derive some benefit from the lesson I have tried to teach you."

"The lesson I have tried to teach you"—for a moment she could not grasp the full meaning of the words. With the memory of his kisses on her lips, with his love words ringing in her ears, how could she understand that they were false?

With wild eyes, and white, wan face, she paced the room. Her ball dress lying on a chair seemed to mock her with the thought of yesterday. She seized the dainty mass of silk and tulle, and trampled on it, treading it out of shape and form, tearing its costly laces with a mad delight. And then his face, tender and smiling, rose before her, she felt his arms about her, his kisses on her lips! With a sharp cry she fell upon her knees, striving in vain to keep back the sobs that shook her frame, the expression of her heart's dull load of sorrow.

Ah, Guy, could you have seen her, in the depths of her humiliation, you would have deemed yourself avenged indeed for every heartache that she made you suffer.

Cecil Warrington told himself repeatedly that the revenge he had taken on the girl who had so cruelly wounded his friend was not only justifiable but praiseworthy. "Served her quite right," he would exclaim viciously, and apparently the repetition of the phrase gave him great comfort, for if he said it once he said it twenty times within the first twenty-four hours of his reprisal.

But after awhile his revenge seemed to grow stale and unprofitable, and when he heard that "the heartless flirt," as he designated Jessie, was seriously ill, he experienced an utter revulsion of feeling, and even went so far as to apply the epithet of "caddish" to his own behaviour.

This being the state of his mind, it was clearly necessary to once more recount the sum of her iniquities against his bosom friend. "The best rider, the finest shot, the most popular man in the regiment brought to destruction by this woman's coquetry. Why, it was positively a moral necessity for her to understand something of what poor Guy had suffered."

But his indignation would not take fire, and in the midst of his expressions of delight that he had made her "sit up," as he called it, the thought of her soft, warm lips, her glorious hair, her eyes, would send the hot blood rushing through his veins and thrilling to his heart.

London gradually grew distasteful. Everywhere Cecil went the one topic of remark seemed to be Miss Casselis' sudden illness. Everybody seemed possessed with the idea that of all things he desired to hear, what would please him most, was the news of Jessie Casselis. "They've cut off all her hair," said Nina Hardy, tearfully, one evening in his hearing, "you know what lovely hair poor Jessie had."

None knew better than he, thought poor Cecil miserably, and forthwith reviled himself in terms of unmitigated bitterness.

"Is Miss Casselis no better?" he asked Nina. "I wish you would tell me just how she is. I'd give anything to hear that she was well."

"I wonder you dare to mention her name," blazed out Nina. "If I were a man I would thrash you for your shameful treatment of her, poor darling. How you *could* be so cruel, so mean, so unscrupulous, I don't know." And the fury of the tempest over, she dissolved in tears.

"I don't suppose you know quite how it all happened," he suggested deprecatingly, but at that Nina fired up again.

"You're mistaken," she said scornfully. "I know the whole affair. Highly creditable your conduct seems to have been, I must say."

"Did Jessie—I mean Miss Casselis—tell you."

"No, she didn't," snapped Nina, "*she's* too honourable to talk of other people's affairs. I came to see her the morning she was taken ill, and found your delightful letter on the floor."

"Miss Hardy," he said humbly, "won't you help me, for your friend's sake?"

"What do you want?" she asked, a thought less brusquely.

"I want to ask her to forgive me—to tell her that what I commenced in play has finished in earnest, and that, be she what she may, I love her and her only."

"I don't suppose she'll believe you," answered Nina, "besides, I don't understand this sudden transition from hate to love. It may easily veer round to hate again. You feel sorry and repentant now because she's ill. When she's better—if she does get better, poor darling—your causeless animosity will probably flare up once more."

"It wasn't exactly causeless," he answered. Not even though he loved her could he quite forgive Guy's broken life. "You don't know what a splendid fellow Guy used to be, Miss Hardy," he went on. "He gave such promise, everyone declared he would make a name for himself, and to see such a fine chap going to pieces through a woman's passion for adulation, is enough to arouse a fellow's animosity."

"It wasn't so much Jessie's fault as you suppose," said Nina. "She was very young at the time, only seventeen, and Guy Redmond was the first man who had ever paid her any attention. She had passed her life up till then in a village parsonage, and the little country girl was quite strange to the ways and manners of Society. Shedidn't understand that by accepting his attentions she was leading him on, and only felt surprise when he accused her of doing so. Still, I think she would have married him but for Mrs. Maynard. You see, when Jessie's father died two years ago, her aunt adopted her—very kind she has been too, in her way—and it would have been ungrateful, to say the least of it, if in return Jessie had married against her aunt's consent."

"Do you mean she loved Guy Redmond?"

"I don't say that. I think she cared for him in a quiet sort of way, which might have grown to something deeper, but she never loved, I am convinced, till now."

Cecil stood and listened with a sense of shame growing at every word. What a brute he had been! For the first time Guy's

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conduct struck him in a different light. It hardly seemed dignified or manly; surely it would have been better to have kept a stiff upper lip, and not have gone over so completely. And yet, how terribly haggard the poor fellow had looked, the last time they had met—in Paris—some six months ago.

"Why, Warrington, old boy, how are you?" A hearty voice roused him from his reverie, and a friendly shake of the hand brought Cecil face to face with Guy himself. But what a different Guy from the one who had so occupied his thoughts of late! Cecil positively blushed under Nina's quizzical glances, as in place of the wan, despairing youth he had depicted, they were greeted by a broad-shouldered, deep-chested young giant, whose fair, good-looking face and hearty laugh betokened excellent health and a mind totally at ease.

For a while they were both silent. Nina, choking with laughter, had disappeared with her face buried in her handkerchief, and neither of the two men wished to speak first.

"You're looking considerably better, Guy," said his friend at last, somewhat grimly.

"Er—yes, old chap, I'm as fit as a fiddle. I got over that affair, you know, much quicker than I thought I should. Indeed, I feel quite grateful to Miss Casselis that she did refuse me, as otherwise I should never have met the sweetest little woman in the world."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, old chap—Daisy Martin—old Martin's daughter, you know, of 'Ours.' She was most awfully good to me all the time—and—er—in short, we're married, old boy, and I want your best congratulations."

"Married!" Cecil heard a strange voice, which he presumed was his own, uttering forced pleasantries, inane congratulations, and all the time the thoughts of the ridiculous muddle he had made of the whole affair—the senseless piece of idiocy he had perpetrated—held possession of his brain.

"Absolutely all the time I was nursing a hatred towards her, that fatuous idiot was making a fool of himself with Daisy Martin," thought poor Cecil. And now, what could he do? If only it were possible to see her, beg her forgiveness, intreat her love once more.

He jumped into a hansom, and arming himself with a large portion of the contents of a florist's shop, lilies, gardenias, roses, and white hyacinths—he drove round to Mrs. Maynard's.

Miss Casselis was better. the delirium had left her, but it would be weeks before she was strong enough to see any visitors whatever!

How should he ever get through the time, he wondered. And indeed his only comfort in those days was Nina. She had relented a little towards him, and daily sent word how the invalid was progressing, what books she liked, her favourite fruit and flowers. At last the welcome news arrived that one day shortly Jessie was coming downstairs, and that if he would be very careful he might see her for a little while.

On a sunny afternoon Jessie, packed up with rugs and cushions, was settled in the drawing-room by the fire. It was very cosy there, and closing her eyes, the girl did not notice that Nina and her aunt had softly left the room, nor that a visitor had been as quickly admitted. It was not till Cecil had reached her side that she roused herself. Before she had time to speak he had taken possession of her hand, and in an odd sort of voice asked her humbly to forgive him.

"I loved you all the time," he told her; "even when I was writing that abominable letter I was thinking of your golden hair, your little hands, your soft grey eyes. Will you forgive me, darling? Will you give me a chance to make you forget my cruelty?"

For a moment she hesitated, then with a little cry she stooped towards him.

"You are not playing with me *now?*" she said.

For answer he caught her in his arms—the heartless flirt he had so bitterly condemned!

And at his touch all memory of her suffering and her sorrow vanished. She nestled closer, her lips sought his again and again.

The woman had found her lover; the moth had reached its star!

John K. Prothero.

THE BEGINNING OF A LOVE STORY.

A Queer Mistake which Brought About Happy Results.

It was just four o'clock in the morning when Miss Clarissa Steele crept quietly downstairs and out at the side door. She stood for a moment on the broad stone steps and took a long, free breath, then she went down the gravel walk into the street.

She turned away from the village, and, as if with a definite object in view, walked swiftly toward the fields and hills to the north.

It was only since April that Elmville had taken a lively interest in birds. It had known vaguely that there were birds within its borders—sparrows, a jackdaw or two, and out in the country, crows, perhaps a few jays.

This limited ornithological knowledge had satisfied Elmville, and when it was heard that in London it was the thing to rise early, take one's opera glasses and go "birding" it had smiled indulgently.

That, however, was two years ago and Elmville was two hundred miles from London. A hundred miles a year was quite fast enough for a fad to travel towards Elmville, but when it finally arrived it was received with enthusiasm.

The little village suddenly awoke to the fact that there were birds in its trees of which it had never dreamt, and birds in its fields and pastures whose very names it had never heard.

It began to talk wisely of greenshanks and warblers, redstarts and lesser whitethroats. Quiet folk who had known of birds all their lives suddenly found themselves in great demand.

This popularity might have turned their heads had it lasted long enough, but when it was discovered that there were questions which they could not answer they were promptly made to know their proper place and to feel like impostors who had been found out.

The newly roused interest in birds took different forms. There were some who made up parties and took long walks in the woods, where they talked and laughed so loudly that all the birds fled before them. This class enjoyed the bird walks greatly and went every week.

Then there was young Mrs. Goodnow, who had seen more birds than anyone else in town, but who could not tell the song of a thrush from that of a cuckoo, declaring naïvely that she did not care anything about the noises the birds made.

Others wondered how she knew so many birds when she did not have her ears to help her, but she had a very fine pair of field-glasses and unlimited time

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There were the two elder Misses Steele, who contented themselves with looking from windows into the tops of the elm and oak trees which grew about their home, and there was their sister Clarissa, who on this beautiful June morning, was out in the country at a little after four.

It was eight when she walked up the path to the side door. She was tired and very hungry, but she was also happy and had a quantity of bird news to tell her sisters.

Breakfast was ready and a delicious odour of hot coffee came out to her through the open door, and she went in eagerly. She hung her hat in the hall, then passed on to the dining-room.

Usually she greeted her sisters with a cheery good morning, but this time she had hardly crossed the threshold before she was aware that something was wrong.

A quick glance at Elinor and Caroline showed her that it must be something very wrong indeed. Her heart began to beat faster and all the happiness seemed suddenly to have gone out of the morning. She looked timidly at her sisters and they stared at her in stony silence.

"What is the matter?" she asked, tremulously.

"I should not think you would need to ask that question, Clarissa Maria," Elinor said in a hollow voice.

"No, I should not think so, too," echoed Caroline.

Now it was only about once in three years that she did anything bad enough for them to call her Clarissa Maria, and at that moment she felt that life was too full of bitterness to be borne. She sank down weakly in a chair and waited.

"To think," began Caroline, in a tone of sadness and reproof, "to think that you should disgrace us, and not only us, but the good name of our family, by making your pretended interest in birds an excuse for going out in the mornings and carrying on a flirtation——"

"A scandalous flirtation," interrupted Elinor.

"Yes, a scandalous flirtation with the curate."

Clarissa started to her feet with a little cry. "I—I never did," she gasped, while the colour rose in her face.

"You saw him this morning. You don't deny that, I suppose, though I don't know," and Caroline shuddered.

"Yes," said Clarissa eagerly. "I did see him. It was down in Mr. Ames' meadow, but he was on one side of the river and I on the other, and we just stopped to speak about birds for a minute."

Elinor smiled sardonically. "And then," she said, "he kissed his hand to you—not once, but several times, and you——"

"Yes, kissed your hand to him," finished Caroline, as Elinor paused and seemed unable to go on. "Yes, Clarissa Maria, you kissed your hand to him. We knew it because Sally Porter was on the hill and heard your voice and saw you do it."

"Oh!" cried Clarissa, her face lighting up, "he did not kiss his hand to me. How could you think he would be so silly? He was just showing me how to call the birds. You just put your fingers to your lips and make a smacking sound, so," and she illustrated, "and somehow it makes the birds come."

The elder sister looked sceptical. "That is a very ingenious excuse," said Caroline, coldly, "and how do you explain your conduct?"

There were tears in Clarissa's eyes now. "I just tried to see if I could do it," she said, with a little sob.

"Well," said Elinor, "I don't know how many people will believe you. You know what Sally Porter is like. You'd better eat your breakfast and then start at once to see and explain to all the people she has told the story to. Come, sit down, things will be stone-cold."

"I—don't want any breakfast; I'm not hungry," and Clarissa went out of the room with her handkerchief held to her eyes.

An hour later Elinor tried Clarissa's door and found it locked. "You'd better come down and eat something," she said, but there was no answer and she went away.

An hour later she came again. This time she shook the door vigorously. "Clarissa," she called in a subdued tone, "come downstairs at once. The curate is here and wants to see you."

"Oh, I can't!" cried Clarissa, in a frightened voice.

"You must," said Elinor, emphatically. "He says he will wait any length of time, but he will see you."

When Clarissa entered the parlour the curate rose to meet her.

"Good morning, Miss Steele," he said. Then they both remembered that they had met before that morning and there was an awkward pause. She looked down at the carpet and he looked at her.

"I think, Miss Clarissa," he said, desperately, when the silence had become unendurable, "I think that you have heard the same thing that I have."

He felt that he had expressed himself vaguely, but she understood and nodded her head without looking up. She tried to keep her lips steady, but she could not prevent the tears from coming. When the curate saw them they seemed to give him the courage of desperation.

"I cannot express to you my regret that I was the cause—the innocent cause—of giving you pain. I would do anything in my power for the privilege of living over this morning and omitting that scene. But only on your account, remember," he went on, impetuously, "only on your account. For myself, I would not care who knew or saw. I would not be content with merely kissing my hand to you, either, and I would be willing to—er—do it on the green in front of the post-office in sight of everybody."

Clarissa was looking at him now, and the curate moved his chair nearer. Her eyes made him think of drowning violets, and he had a strong desire to save them.

"Clarissa," he said, "did you ever want something very, very much, but, knowing that it was far beyond your reach, after a time almost forgot that you wanted it, and deceived yourself into thinking that you were happy without it? Did you, Clarissa?"

She nodded.

"Well," he went on, "that has been my experience, and this morning something happened that brought it all back to me, and—oh, Clarissa! I don't see how I can live without you any longer."

She was silent for a moment, then she said softly, "I don't think you will have to."

S. B. Robb.

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HOW I CHAPERONED BELINDA.

By Lady Peggy Carstairs.

THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS.

LADY PEGGY CARSTAIRS. A widow, who, having lost all her money in a bank failure, undertakes to chaperon Belinda.

BELINDA NORTH. The beautiful daughter of Hardy North, an Australian millionaire.

DUKE OF EASTACRES. A comparatively penniless suitor for Belinda's hand.

DAVID CARR. A young engineer, with whom Belinda is in love.

LADY HONORIA. Sister of the Duke of Eastacres.

STANLEY FORBES. A famous barrister.

ALPHONSE HERVÉ. An eminent French artist in love with Belinda.

PRINCESS VERA ZOULOFF. A celebrated Russian beauty.

BARON ROLLA. An extremely wealthy Parisian, in love with Belinda.

PAUL DE SONNAZ. A young French nobleman, and friend of Lady Peggy.

Vera's Last Reception.

A SUDDEN panic spread through the room. There is always a latent terror of Nihilists in Russian society, and a vague suspicion that the face referred to might belong to one of the dread band thrilled the women, and some of the men, to fear.

Paul de Sonnaz put an end to the suspense. He hurried from the room and passed from the wide hall into the great court. We watched him approach the figure crouching by the window, the figure of a woman as we now saw it to be.

Paul laid his hand upon her shoulder, turning her so that the light of the moon fell full upon the face—indescribably haggard, thin to attenuation, with great hollow eyes, full of a fierce, almost wolfish, look of hunger.

She was dressed in a long and somewhat shapeless garment; its black folds enveloped her from head to foot. She raised her hand to her head in a bewildered fashion when de Sonnaz spoke. Something in the gesture struck me as familiar.

"Belinda," I said hoarsely; "do you recognise her? She——"

With a cry Belinda flung up the window.

"It is Honoria," she said; "my poor Honoria!"

And to her eternal shame and disgrace Honoria it proved to be!

Always of weak intellect, she seemed to have become quite imbecile, and was totally unable to give a coherent account of how she came to the palace, or what she purposed doing.

"I wanted Belinda," she said dully. Then when the girl came to her, and with soft words and tender gestures soothed her, she gave a piercing shriek, and put her hands once more to her head.

"The pain," she said, "the awful pain. Don't let him in"—she pointed to the door—"for Heaven's sake don't let him in. He will kill me." She glanced round fearfully. "He's tried to starve me," she went on, speaking under her breath; "but that isn't quick enough. He'll find me, he's sure to find me, but——" The poor creature fell on her knees and clasped Belinda's skirts; "don't let him in, say you won't let him in?"

"Nobody shall hurt you, Honoria dear," said Belinda softly. "Tell me of whom you are afraid?"

Honoria shuddered, but made no reply. Weak she was and foolish, and stupid to the point of idiocy, and yet she still possessed some strange distorted sense of loyalty that forbade her to reveal the name of the man who had so shamefully used her.

That man was her husband, Mark Striven. It afterwards transpired that he had started a gambling saloon in the environs of Paris, and having a numerous acquaintance, had speedily worked up a large and paying *clientèle*.

Honoria had assisted him at first; dressed in good taste, with her hair becomingly arranged, and her sallow skin touched up with rouge and *blanc de perles*, she had looked—I was assured—quite nice looking! At any rate, some of the *habitués* of the saloon thought so, and took no pains to hide their admiration.

A certain young and charming Comte had, I was told, been desperately enamoured of poor Honoria. He was wealthy and devoted to cards, and Mark Striven looked to make a year's income at the least from him. His expectations were, however, disappointed, his designs thwarted.

Honoria, like all plain women, was aggressively virtuous. She declined to have anything to do with the Comte and finally refused to see him! As a result the young man withdrew his patronage from Striven's saloon, and a large decrease of that gentleman's income immediately took place.

Mark bullied and threatened in vain, Honoria, with the obstinacy of a small brained woman, declined to hear reason. Of what followed one could not get a clear idea.

My own suspicions suggest that Mark Striven, who had insured Honoria's life after their marriage, had determined to waste no money in prolonging her existence. The seeds of consumption were already in her constitution, and phthisis, assisted by a light diet and insufficient warmth, is very easily encouraged.

Honoria, however, cut short her husband's plan; she escaped from the house in the Rue Burgoyne and made her way from one place to another in search of Belinda until she reached the palace of the Ortoffs.

I wired to Mark Striven in the morning, but, pending his arrival—he was to meet us on the road to Florence—I made no demur to Belinda's suggestion that Honoria should accompany us. I realised that I might have a use for Honoria.

Gossip was very rife in the palace concerning the girl, her terrible appearance and the strange fashion of her arrival, but the Eastacres generally had such a reputation for eccentricity that her escapade was not made so much of as would have been the case with any other woman.

"That Striven is a beast," said Toffy when the first alarm and surprise at Honoria's white face and wild air had died away. "It's my belief he'll kill the woman before he's done with her."

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A belief that many of us shared, but which good taste prevented our expressing.

We knew—every one of us—that it was more than likely that Mark had designs on Honoria's insurance money, just as we knew that old Lady Calistares had put her unfortunate stepson to sleep in damp sheets in the hope that rheumatic fever would clear him off and make room for her own boy; and that the Marquis of Onnerton had fired the gun that killed his brother, Lord Chiverton—not by accident as the public believed—but from jealousy; he suspected Chiverton of an intrigue with his wife.

You people think you hear of all the strange affairs that take place in Society. In reality you don't know one half, and of those that reach your ears you have not the key.

As I say, we knew these things but never let our knowledge appear.

From the Ortoff Palace we started for Italy.

Of all places in the world, Belinda set her heart upon staying at Verona, with its sun-baked streets, its grim, dust-covered fortifications, its little lines of stunted trees; Verona, where the bitter, piercing mountain winds sweep through the town, stirring the grasses—all alive with brown lizards—that grow in the courtyards of the great, desolate houses.

Belinda, with her head full of romance, grew enthusiastic over the place, and raved of its wonderful palaces; for the most part in ruins, and let out in floors. We lodged in one of these mansions, and our rooms were typical of Italy.

The superb staircase was—before we came—coated in filth, the courtyard, which would have held a troop of soldiers, was given over to weeds and lizards; chambers, hung with costly tapestries, were knee-deep in dust, and on walls boasting world-famous cartoons, were hung the *padrona*—or caretaker's—garments.

Windows, thick with grime, were festooned with roses and vines, everywhere the luxury of beauty, side by side with the deepest poverty, the most hideous dirt!

The upper rooms of the palace were tenanted by workpeople and art students. A singer occupied the floor above our own, and the lower halls were the abode of the caretaker and her troop of children.

Verona is a city little visited save by artists and tourists; personally, I should never have gone near the place. I only did so by reason of Belinda.

At Verona, Mark Striven came to claim his wife. We received him in the *salon*, a huge chamber with a wonderful ceiling, where lovely women laughed down from frescoes of roses, and where the vine leaves arched round the casement.

The room was heavy with the scent of lilies and magnolia. Belinda, tall and stately, in a wonderful Venetian gown that the *padrona* had fished out from an old chest, wore a knot of the odorous blossoms at her throat.

"Where is Honoria?" said Mark abruptly.

"She is in my room," replied Belinda, "and"—the girl eyed him firmly—"she is going to stay there."

"I don't crave for her immediate society," he said sneering; "so long as she's ready to start with me to-morrow morning, she can stay where she is for to-night."

"She shall not come with you to-morrow," said Belinda. "You dare not risk a scene, a scandal, and if you try to take her away I'll summon the police."

"My dear Lady Peggy"—he turned to me with a smile—"your charge talks a little wildly. She——"

I interrupted him.

"Belinda is very anxious that Honoria should stay with her for a time. They are attached to each other, if you could spare your wife a little while we should be delighted." I beamed as I spoke, adroitly edging off Belinda to the door.

"Leave it to me, you silly girl," I whispered, "go upstairs out of the way, and I'll settle the thing in five minutes."

"Now, Mark," said I when Belinda had gone, "if you're prepared to discuss the matter quietly, so much the better—for you. If not——" I shrugged and seated myself beside him.

"What's the game?" he said abruptly—Striven never could turn a phrase.

"Matters stand thus, I believe: Your wife has run away owing to your cruelty, you want her back, Belinda wishes her to stay. Well," I paused, "Belinda is prepared to pay something for Honoria's companionship."

"Five hundred down," snapped the wretch. "Not a penny less."

I laughed contemptuously. "You're dealing with me, my dear man," I cried, "and you might as well demand the moon as five hundred pounds!"

"Very good," he rose as he spoke. "I miss Honoria, I'd just as soon have her as not."

"Easier said than done, Mark. You don't know Belinda. She'll go to any lengths to stop you taking Honoria."

"There'll be no necessity to take her," he returned with a laugh. "I've only to say 'come' to Honoria, and she'll follow me like a lamb. Do you suppose I've lived with her these six months and not discovered how to manage her? She obeys me like a dog, or a slave. She's mine, body and soul."

"While you're there, yes, but in your absence——"

"She'd never have got away but for that scoundrel Stanley Forbes," he said, raising his voice in anger. "He came to the Rue Burgoyne when I was out and bribed the woman there to let him see Honoria. He put the idea of leaving me into her head. I'll swear it. Once she's back she won't get clear again," and he laughed vindictively.

"But do you want her back now?" I asked suggestively. "Why not leave her here with us? I can manage to lend you one hundred pounds if it's a question of ready money."

He paused, then leaning forward, brought his face, his evil face, close to mine.

"You've some scheme on foot," he said slowly. "What is it? It's no good to try to bluff me, Lady Peggy. You're not so fond of Belinda as to put up with Honoria for her sake. Come, what is it?" And he smiled with an attempted familiarity that revolted me.

"Belinda has expressed a wish for Honoria's society," I returned. "I am prepared to pay for that wish——"

"To the extent of five hundred pounds?" he queried.

I saw that he was determined, and wearied by the struggle and just a little fearful of what he might discover if the conversation were prolonged, I made a compromise.

"I'll give you a hundred down," I said, "and the remainder—when she returns."

"And that will be?"

"Within six months," I answered steadily. "Possibly within three."

"Give me the cash," he said, "and I'll clinch the bargain."

I handed him notes to the value of one hundred pounds, and then, after a little further talk with Mark, I summoned his wife.

"Honoria," I said, "Mark wishes you to return with him."

For a moment she stood still, glancing at me with wild, startled-looking eyes.

"Must I?" she whispered. "Oh, Lady Peggy, won't you let me stop? I'll work," she wrung her helpless-looking hands, "or do anything if you'll keep me."

"Come here!" said Mark abruptly, and at the sound of his voice she shrank as from a blow.

"You want to stay here?" he said.

Her eyes studied his face, seeking in abject submission to discover what he wished her to reply. What she read therein emboldened her to answer truthfully.

"Yes, if you please, Mark, if you don't mind."

"Very well, you shall stay, but on one condition." He grasped her arm tightly as he spoke, so that he hurt her. "You stay here on the understanding that whatever Lady Peggy tells you to do, you do without question or demur."

Honoria glanced like a frightened, fascinated rabbit, from Mark's keen eyes to mine.

"I don't quite understand," she said.

Mark's face grew grim.

"You're not asked to understand," he said, "only to obey. Lady Peggy may want you to do certain things for Belinda's good," he chuckled as he spoke, "but to which she may object.

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Are you prepared to obey orders in spite of Belinda, or," he tightened his grip on her arm so that she gave a low, faint cry, "or will you come back with me?"

There was a short, tense silence. The roses blown by the night wind beat against the casement, and the vine leaves shivered with the cold.

Honoria's great eyes searched her husband's face, and she trembled and turned a more ghastly white than she had been before. There were strange, dark secrets in her married life, short though it had been.

She had a great and well-founded dread of Mark, it would be to her a living martyrdom to return. And yet the price of liberty was a high one.

Belinda had been good to her, of all the women she had met, this girl alone had shown her love and kindliness. Did she consent to obey me, her powers of reasoning, small though they were, convinced her that the obedience would be hurtful to Belinda.

I watched her in suspense. That any woman should put another's comfort before her own is surprising, but, that a woman so miserable as Honoria should weigh Belinda's happiness against her own wretchedness, struck me as phenomenal.

"Well," said Mark, "well?" he gazed at her fixedly, and something in his look must have recalled past scenes of cruelty, for Honoria wrenched herself from his hold, and, in a high-pitched, gasping voice, cried—

"I will do whatever Lady Peggy wishes. Indeed, indeed I will, if I may stay!"

Late that night, when Mark had taken his departure, I was aroused from slumber by the entry of a tall, ungainly figure, garbed in a hideous dressing-gown. Honoria, for it was she, stumbled across the room, and fell on her knees at my bedside.

"You don't mean any harm to her?" she cried, "say you don't mean any harm! I'd rather die than hurt Belinda. I wish that I had died long, long ago. What shall I do—what *can* I do?"

She rocked herself to and fro, her weak face distorted with grief, her long thin hands clutching the drapery upon the bed.

"Why didn't you let me take the poison long ago, in Cairo? There's only one person in the world who cares for me, who has been kind to me, and I have promised to go against her. Don't hurt Belinda, Lady Peggy—*don't!*"

It was an unpleasant and an unnerving scene. In my heart I felt a little sorry for Honoria. She was one of those persons who are condemned to act as pawns upon life's chess board, moved hither and thither at the bidding, and for the convenience of the stronger and more powerful pieces, and yet she was a contemptible object, with her tears and her protestations! I gave her a dose of sal-volatile and got her off to bed, under the assurance that I intended no ill will to Belinda.

Next morning we left the city of Verona. The mountain wind was cold; Belinda shivered in her furs, and the roses, yellow as gold, that lay in her lap, shivered before the blast. Slowly but surely the cold, cruel hand of Fate would shrivel the roses of her faith, her hope, her love. She was looking wan and pale, and she was strangely apathetic. Things were working as I had planned them.

That night I sent to Eastacres an urgent and imperative letter; what I said to him, and how that which he and I conspired to bring about took place, you shall learn in the sequel.

One word I must say here in my own defence. What you have learnt of me up to the present has doubtless shocked you, secure in your respectable, if dull and commonplace, homes. What you will learn before this series ends will cause you to condemn me more bitterly than before. But, in passing judgment, remember this—

I was a woman past middle-age, fighting desperately and fiercely to keep her place in the world. I had no son to keep me, and my daughters one and all were ungrateful and averse to me. I was fighting for a security against the poverty and all the attendant horrors of a penniless old age. And in the fight I gave no quarter—in like case would you, most respectable of British matrons, have done any better?

We came to Florence, the City of Flowers, at the close of a glorious day.

The great white statues of the church of Santa Trinita rose like snow against the golden sky. Monte Oliveto towered dark against the rosy glory of the west. There was a sweet sea wind blowing which fanned out as it went all the spiced odours of the woods and fields.

The shops of the goldsmiths and mosaic sellers, and alabaster workers, gleamed and sparkled in the light. Everywhere there was some beauty, some fragrance, some treasure; and above all rose the wondrous shaft of the Campanile, gleaming like gold and ivory in the sun.

Near the great square in the centre of the city where Savonarola was put to death, lies the Palace of the Ubertas, once the stronghold of the noblest and most powerful family in Florence; it has now fallen into the hands of a little Jew, who lets it to those English or Americans who can afford to pay the extravagant price that he demands. Here it was that Princess Vera had established herself. A few nights after our arrival she gave a reception.

The rooms were filled with late violets, narcissus and rich red roses. The front of the palace was decorated with innumerable lights—quaint lanterns fashioned in the shape of butterflies, dragon-flies, and wreaths of lotus-lilies. The balcony was hung with scarlet, and from it a band of sweet-voiced Florentines sang the songs of the country.

In the great reception-rooms, stately women with wonderful dark eyes and lustrous hair talked to young English girls; secretaries of Legation chatted to American explorers and men of business, who in turn listened in wonderment to the ecstasies of a picturesque Italian enthusing over a work of art.

Vera had arranged a surprise for her guests. A little before midnight she and some twenty other ladies disappeared, to re-enter on the stroke of twelve, fantastically attired. Each had selected the costume of some world-famous heroine. Belinda had chosen Joan of Arc, and habited in clanking armour, her fair hair loose on her shoulders, she looked to the life the peasant maid who freed her country.

Vera had chosen a strange, a sinister *rôle*. She was robed as the great woman-poisoner— Lucrezia Borgia. Her gown was a marvel, and a murmur of admiration followed her. The train was of cloth of gold, and the scarlet skirts beneath were studded with tiny flames of rubies.

In her hair she wore a snake of gold with emeralds for its eyes; round her neck hung a gold chain, from it suspended a number of charms, a death-head in silver with diamond eyes, a cross with a crown of thorns in pearls and sapphires.

Last, but most strange, most beautiful of all, poised just above the apple of her soft white throat, there hung a huge moth, with iridescent wings and jewel-like body. The thing was fastened to a tiny brooch, the pin of which went through its exquisite body. It was alive, quivering in a prolonged and terrible death-agony.

It was the mode at that time for women to wear live things as ornaments. Jewelled tortoises hung with other costly trifles on a chatelaine, tiny snakes whose bright green bodies glittered in the light, were used to clasp the bodice of an evening dress. It was a strange craze, but it was original and among our set had a great vogue.

Vera took a keen, almost a savage delight in these additions to her toilette, but to-night she had eclipsed herself. The moth or beetle, whatever it might be, was the most lovely thing imaginable.

Other women there were garbed as Beatrice whom Dante loved, Margaret de Medici of evil fame, but none so superb, so wonderful as Vera. She stood at the end of the great chamber side by side with Belinda, and the guests applauded to the echo.

Belinda looked sad and wistful.

She was just as dreamy and distracted as Joan of Arc

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herself. It was a wonderful scene typical of modern luxury and modern art.

Outside lay Florence of five hundred years ago; the white moonshine falling on the statues in the square, the bronze Perseus, the famous Hercules and David.

"A horrible sight!" murmured one of the guests, a clever but sardonic man, who has made himself a reputation as the most daring traveller in Europe.

I glanced round quickly in surprise.

For answer he motioned to the moth glittering on Vera's neck.

"A savage opens fire on the living body of his enemy, and you people at home shriek at his inhumanity and demand his punishment. Your great lady is crueller far than the savage; she takes a gentle, pretty creature and tortures it for her amusement. Look!" he pointed to the beetle which was making a last convulsive struggle to get free.

As the man—his name was Francis Claverton—watched, a change came over his face. Surprise, interrogation tinged with fear, chased over his countenance, and he pressed through the throng closer to the Princess.

A sudden stir at the other end of the apartment diverted my attention. Two guests—late, but most welcome—had arrived.

Alphonse Hervé and David Carr entered together.

I watched the two men closely, and read their secret in a glance. Alphonse looked at Vera, and his eyes remained on her face. David flashed a look at the brilliant beauty in red and gold, then turned his eyes to the quiet, pure face of the girl beside her.

She did not seem surprised or glad to see him, but smiled in a vague, and to him a disappointing fashion. But as she met his eyes, burning with love, the colour mounted to her face. She put out her hand and clasped his own.

Watching, I set my teeth. Despite my skill, my plotting, and my cunning, love for a time had worsted me. Memory had knocked at the door of the girl's heart, and while a woman has life she will thrill to the memory of the first kisses that burnt on her lips and her throat, the first clasp of the arms that unlocked for her the gates of the garden of love.

In the background stood Farringdon, pale and quiet. He had come there that night for his answer; but the look on Belinda's face, the light in her eyes, was answer enough. She was not for him, nor for any, but David the man she loved.

Vera had eyes for none of this. She was conscious only that Alphonse had returned to her, forgetful of the past, conscious only that she was beautiful exceedingly, and that he loved her.

That he might see her robed in a queen's magnificence, and receiving the homage of a crowd, she had defied prejudice, laughed at comment, and in the third month of her widowhood had held a great reception. Society was shocked, but it flocked to the reception all the same.

Alphonse bent over her hand with perfect grace.

"Forgive me," he murmured. She raised her eyes, the message that they gave needed no words. She swayed towards him, the scent of the roses that she carried filled the air. She was at the zenith of her youth and beauty; the moth at her throat trembled in an ecstasy of pain. It had twisted itself free from the pin and in its death struggle lay close to her skin. The Princess put up her hand to brush it aside.

"Stop!" cried a hard, clear voice—the voice of Francis Claverton—"don't touch it. The thing is deadly if it stings you. Ah!" he broke off short. Vera's slim white fingers had grasped and flung the insect from her in contempt.

There was a tiny mark upon her throat; it might be the mark of the gold chain. It might be——

Claverton stepped forward.

"If the insect has bitten you," he said, "*in three days you will be dead!*"

(A further exciting instalment will appear next Tuesday.)

Your Editor Chats.

On the page overleaf you will find the sixth of the Love Problem stories. It is called "A Secret Hoard," and the problem dealt with is "Should a Husband Tell His Wife His Business Troubles?" If any readers know of problems of a similar kind they would like to see discussed in *Short Stories*, I shall be glad if they will send them along, and, if suitable, I will get them written up in story form.

There has not been time yet for me to receive many more opinions regarding what Lady Peggy Carstairs wrote about middle-class people. One correspondent, however, thinks that Lady Peggy was a very wicked woman to scheme as she did to get money out of Belinda's father by chaperoning his daughter, and trying to force her into an undesirable marriage, even though it was to a man of title. In this week's instalment of "How I Chaperoned Belinda" you will see how Lady Peggy endeavours to justify her behaviour in this matter.

Next Tuesday will be a red-letter day in the annals of *Short Stories*, for on that day your little favourite will contain more good things than it has ever done before.

In the first place, there is a new serial from the pen of Mr. R. Norman Silver. Its title is

"HELD APART."

Mr. Silver's work is well known to readers of *Short Stories*. His serial "The Golden Dwarf" is perhaps best known. "Held Apart" is a present-day romance, in which the love element is very strong, and powerful new situations are introduced.

Secondly, there is the first of a series of true stories called

"THE CONFESSIONS OF A SELF-MADE GIRL."

These will appeal more particularly to my lady readers, I expect, and I hope many of them will gather useful hints from the life of this self-made girl. Though she has got on so well, she had to go through a great many unpleasant experiences, and country girls coming to London to make their living will do well to take warning, and so perhaps they will be able to avoid some of the pitfalls which are so plentiful in this great city.

Thirdly, and perhaps not of the least interest, is an entirely

NEW COMPETITION,

of which I will not say more now than that valuable prizes are offered to the winners, and that everyone will have an equal opportunity of winning the prizes.

So, altogether, you will see that next Tuesday's *Short Stories* is not to be missed if you like getting good value for your money. The three things mentioned above will all be fresh next week.

Further instalments of "How I Chaperoned Belinda," and "The Albert Gate Mystery" will appear as usual, as well as several complete short tales.

Your Editor.

RESULT OF THE "LIFE" COMPETITION.

The Gramophone prizes have been awarded as follows: T. Tatlow, 136 Main Street, Bulwell, Notts; G. Lilley, 40 Sea View Terrace, Swansea; B. Carthew, 51 Hawthorn Road, Willesden Green, N.W.; G. A. Hughes, 11 Virgil Street, Cornbrook, Manchester; H. Lynch, 16 Broad Street, Miletown, Sheerness; A. Barnes, 16 Scott Street, Maidstone; Mrs. Amos, 7 Harold Mews, St. Leonards-on-Sea; Miss Ada Thompson, 34 Rowena Crescent, Battersea; J. G. Persich, 88 Eglisfield Road, South Shields; E. Walters, 5 Mayfields, Kirkdale, Liverpool.

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Love Problem No. 6.

A Secret Hoard.

Should a Husband Tell his Wife his Business Troubles?

Many women have a kind of subtle instinct which teaches them at once when their menfolk are in trouble. This applies more particularly to married people, perhaps, for marriage intensifies a mutual sympathy, which in its turn brings forth the instinct which we mention.

Now Nora Heywood couldn't have written out this theory to save her life, but she could do better still, she could illustrate it, and she did so every day of her life.

The manner in which she attended to her husband's comforts and saw to his wants almost before he had time to express them, was enough to make a bachelor turn all kinds of assorted colours with envy; and if Jack Heywood should be so fortunate—we use the word advisedly—as to have any trouble, business or otherwise, then indeed she was in her element.

It was then she rose to the possibilities of a woman's powers of consolation, and appreciated her position as the one to whom he looked first and foremost at such times.

And yet, in spite of all this devotion on the part of his wife, Jack was an undeserving kind of fellow.

If it were a matter they both knew about he would tell the progress of the trouble as it rose to its height, and then gradually disappeared, as such things do when they are bravely met.

But in the case of some business worry of which she had no preliminary knowledge he kept it to himself as long as he possibly could. He valued her warm-hearted, comforting little ways more than anything else in the world, and yet when possible, he bore his trouble alone rather than throw a single shadow across her happiness.

And so he was an undeserving kind of fellow, and not worthy of a wife who would have been only too pleased to have sacrificed anything for his sake. And not only would have done so, but actually did. She had pinched and scraped ever since they had been married to save out of her housekeeping allowance.

When they drew their chairs to the fireside after their two-year-old daughter had gone to bed, they divided the newspaper and solemnly tossed-up to see who was to have the better half, that is, the half with most news in.

Jack and Nora would have been in very serious trouble indeed before they would have neglected such an old family custom as this.

"Heads!" said Jack absent-mindedly, as the coin spun, but it came tails, the first time for more than a fortnight.

"Will you let me see the penny, please?" Nora said next moment.

Jack handed it to her without a word, and she looked at it very carefully, both sides. Then she placed it on the mantelpiece, and threw her arms round his neck

"What is the matter to-night?" she murmured. "You must tell me at once, Jack, you really must."

"The matter?" he stammered.

"Yes, I thought something was wrong when you came home because I had baked a cake and you didn't make any jokes about it, and you took scarcely any notice of little Chirps, although you talked and laughed quite a lot to me, and generally it's more the other way about. Not that I'm jealous at all."

"And why did you want to look at the penny?" said Jack, who was rather staggered by all this circumstantial evidence.

"Because for over a week you've been tossing with a double-headed penny," she answered indignantly. "I don't know where you got it from, and I couldn't understand why you won so often until about a week ago I found it in your lounge coat, when I had to sew on a button."

"And you didn't say anything about it!"

"No," she said sturdily. "I liked you to have first choice. And to-night you were so worried, my poor old Jack, that you forgot all about your patent penny, and brought out an ordinary one, and so you lost. And that confirmed my suspicions. Now just tell me all about it instanter."

And she looked so determined and yet so sympathetic that it is very probable he would have yielded, and told her what the trouble was. But just at this moment there was a thundering rat-a-tat-tat at the front door. Little Chirps was awakened by the noise and gave them a vocal hint to that effect.

Nora ran upstairs to soothe her off to sleep, whilst Jack attended to the front door. And as he turned to go, all the forced smiles and the gaiety disappeared from his face, and a look of intense suffering came in their place.

"Fifty pounds!" he groaned. "Fifty pounds, or ruin and disgrace. It seemed such a safe speculation at the time, and so simple to borrow the money by a bill of sale. My poor Nora! Oh, it will break her heart to have the home broken up like this! The time expired to-day, and he says he can't wait. If I could even pay something substantial on account! If I could—— Oh, anything, rather than bring such trouble upon her!"

The next day was Saturday. As Jack was going off to business Nora suddenly remembered the question she had asked the previous night, which had been driven from her mind by the arrival of the visitors.

"You didn't tell me after all?" she said reproachfully.

"What about? I can't wait now, Nora. The train's coming," and he started down the garden walk.

"I shall remind you at dinner-time!" she cried.

"Very well, I'll tell you then," and to himself he muttered: "They may come this afternoon. He only gave me till two o'clock."

Nora walked slowly along the hall, trying in vain to guess what the trouble was. When she reached the dining-room, she found to her dismay that little Chirps had taken possession of the jam-dish, and was engaged in painting a gorgeous design of strawberries upon the table-cloth.

"Baby's pik-ker," said the young lady, with conscious pride, and was astonished at the lack of appreciation her mother showed.

Nora was feeling rather hurt just now at her husband's refusal to explain his troubles. "But I suppose he thinks a woman is of no use for business," she sighed, with just a touch of bitterness. "Although I might have comforted him a bit if he'd told me what was wrong. Perhaps he'll feel better when he gets his birthday present.

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"If I hadn't a head for business I couldn't have saved twenty pounds in less than three years. Three heads for three separate businesses, in fact, a dressmaker, a cook, and a housekeeper," she added triumphantly, some of her good spirits returning at the thought. "But we'll get our work done, Chirps, and then we'll go and buy some meat, and some potatoes, and a cabbage, and—*A piano!*" she said, in such a tone that even her daughter cried "Tum, muvver!" as though she would set out forthwith.

And then began such a bustling, and hurrying, and clearing away, and washing up and dusting and I don't know what else. Little Chirps was eager to help, and solemnly dried her tin breakfast cup some forty times over with a miniature dish cloth, being a great believer in doing her work thoroughly.

Then they went upstairs to make the beds and to do more dusting and cleaning and hurrying and bustling. And little Chirps, to show her willingness, successively climbed on to nearly everything above floor level, and then fell off again. And so at last their morning's work was done, and the house, to unappreciative male eyes, would probably have appeared just as nice and clean as when they began.

And then they started on their way to the shops, Nora with one of those tiny baskets, too small to hold anything, but which every self-respecting woman finds absolutely necessary when she goes shopping. Little Chirps pattered by her side, bearing a woolly doll with glass eyes, whom she affectionately addressed as "Tummy."

"You'll be sure to send the meat up before half-past eleven?" said Nora sternly to the butcher.

"Certainly mum. Jim," to an incredibly busy assistant, who looked as though he had all the beef and mutton in England to deliver before midday, "Mrs. Heywood's leg, go 'fore 'leven-thirty prompt. Yes'm, g'morn'm."

Then the greengrocer staked his reputation that the vegetables should also arrive by eleven-thirty, and Nora departed, knowing full well that neither of them would fulfil his promise.

There was still one more purchase to make, but that was the most important of all. "Won't he be delighted when it arrives?" she thought rapturously, as she entered the shop. "I'll ask them not to deliver it until the 27th, and then it will be a real birthday present. And he doesn't know I've saved anything. I want to look at some pianos," she said to the shopman.

"Yes'm. Thirty, forty, fifty, a hundred guineas?"

"N—no, about twenty pounds, please."

It was half-past two before Jack arrived home. Nora and the child had their dinner, and then walked down to the station to meet him.

The train had just come in, and the people were crowding out of the narrow gates. Nora waited in her usual place on the other side of the road, for it was understood from the first that Jack, on leaving the station, was to glance across towards a certain shop in front of which Nora always stood when she came to meet him.

But to-day he hurried away without even a glance towards his wife and little daughter. One or two friends tried to detain him for a minute, but he nodded curtly, and almost ran down Barton Road.

"Jack Heywood seems upset," said someone who stood close to Nora. "He's been looking rather bothered for a few days past."

Nora waited for no more, but set off at the highest speed that Little Chirps could muster. When they reached the house she let herself in with the latchkey. Jack did not seem to have heard them, for he sat beside the table with his head buried in his hands.

"Oh, you poor, poor Jack!" she cried, and ran towards him; then stopped suddenly, frightened by his haggard expression.

"Rather say 'poor wife'!" he groaned. "It is upon you that the blow will fall worst."

"Well, I'm quite satisfied," she answered, bravely. "Now tell me all about it."

Rat-a-tat! Nora looked impatiently towards the door. "I'll go," she said, "and I'll get rid of them as soon as possible. Don't you trouble, Jack. You're not well."

"I must go," he answered hoarsely. "I'll tell you everything in a moment."

The arrival was ushered into the front room. Jack spoke to him for a few minutes and then returned to Nora. She met him at the door with one finger held out warningly.

"Now, remember," she said, with a sternness that only intensified the quivering of her lips, "You've got to tell me all about it, everything; but if you dare to apologise for the slightest little tit or jottle—or jit or tottle," she added hurriedly, "for I'm not sure which is correct; or if you dare to say you are to blame in any possible way, I won't believe you, so mind." And she plunged herself down upon a foot-stool, with her head against his knee.

"It's soon explained," he said sadly. "Business was quiet and someone offered me an agency which seemed to promise well, and is actually doing well, though slowly. They required a deposit of fifty pounds, and, as you know, we haven't a fifth of that sum—here is all we have, about seven pounds—so I went to a firm of money-lenders, and gave them a bill of sale on the furniture, expiring to-day.

"The agreement gives him the right to seize our furniture—the very chairs and tables—whether I have paid the interest or not. He says he wants his principal to-day, or at any rate half to-day and the rest in three months."

Nora rose to her feet with her eyes almost on fire, so brightly did they shine, and yet in every other way she was as calm as possible.

"Then I suppose we must pay the fellow a half," she said carelessly, and put her hand in her pocket for her purse, while Jack, who had also risen from his chair, looked at her in amazement.

But the next moment she uttered a scream of terror. All her pretended calmness vanished like a puff of smoke.

"Oh, my purse! My purse!" she cried piteously. "I've lost it, Jack!"

"Muvver c'ies," said Little Chirps gravely.

Jack looked round suddenly. There sat his daughter beneath the table with an open purse on her lap and an absolute crowd of sovereigns arranged in rows upon the carpet.

"There's the money!" cried Nora, who had turned round at the same time. "She must have taken my purse from my pocket or from the table. I was going to buy you a piano to practise your songs on but they were rather expensive, so I left it until nearer your birthday. But I'll never save out of 'housekeeping' again without telling you."

"On the other hand," said Jack. "If I had told you at once what the trouble was, we might have saved a lot of this."

"No, dads," said Chirps solemnly. But it must be explained that as the young lady could not say "Yes" she said "No" in either case, leaving it to her audience to apply her word in the best possible manner.

Jack lifted her suddenly to his shoulder. "Come along," he said to Nora, "and we'll pay the fellow a half as you suggested."

Wal Fratik.

SOME FEATURES OF NEXT WEEK'S *SHORT STORIES.*

A long first instalment of R. Norman Silver's powerful serial "Held Apart."

The first of a series entitled "Confessions of a Self-Made Girl," which will appeal more particularly to our lady readers.

A Competition of quite a new kind, in which valuable prizes of money gifts are offered.

Besides these attractions, *Short Stories* will contain the usual instalments of "How I Chaperoned Belinda," and "The Albert Gate Mystery," as well as several short, complete tales.

The price will as usual be

One Penny.

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BELLE'S CHAMPION

OR

A QUESTION OF HONESTY.

"BELLE, my dear, you must consider yourself on trial, with the girls in the workroom as jury. Girls, the charge against Belle is that she was caught in the very act of—h'm!—exchanging more than brotherly greetings with Jack Hassell; in fact, the charge is that they were kissing each other!"

A titter of merriment passed along the workroom; the girls dared not laugh outright, lest the sound brought Madame Brunetti, the head of the firm of Court dressmakers, to the door to inquire into the unseemly conduct.

"Don't be absurd!" cried Belle, with flaming cheeks. "It was nothing of the kind. It's too bad of you!"

The girls appeared to enjoy Belle's vexation and her indignant denial. They were a merry set and this teasing was all fun. Life in a dressmaking establishment is not so full of enjoyment that they could afford to forego a little joke.

"That remains to be proved," proceeded the accuser, with difficulty preserving a straight face. "It is well known that you and Jack are on excellent terms, to begin with."

"He helped me, and his mother helped me, long ago, and I tried to do him a good turn if I could, by speaking for him when Madame wanted a young fellow downstairs in the shop!" said Belle earnestly. "It was a better situation than he had, cleaner and more money. We are good friends, of course. Why shouldn't we be? But it's utterly wrong, what you are saying, and you are only doing it to tease and annoy me, and I won't listen!"

The self-constituted prosecuting counsel, still proceeding with her work, for it was a busy time, and the day's task had to be got through, was about to continue her speech when the joke was interrupted by a long whistle from the speaking tube. One girl answered the summons and called out to Belle that she was wanted in the showroom.

"I expect old Brown has seen you and she is going for you!" said the prosecuting advocate.

Belle smiled with exaggerated disdain and went downstairs to see Madame Brunetti, whose real name was, in fact, Brown.

Isabel Lawrence had been chaffed more than once about Jack Hassell, but the jesting had not assumed the present proportions. She was between seventeen and eighteen, and had had a hard struggle to support her crippled brother and herself since the death of her father. During the earlier part of this fight against want, she had received many kindnesses at the hands of Mrs. Hassell and also from Jack, who was about her own age and with whom she had lodged. Then Madame Brunetti, who had known her mother in former times, chanced to hear of her and assisted her to the extent of taking her as an apprentice without premium and paying her a fair wage for her work. From that time things began to look brighter for her.

Mrs. Hassell was a poor woman, and was glad when her boy was old enough to leave school and go out to work as an errand boy. He was a splendid specimen of a muscular lad, but his education had been greatly interrupted and his upbringing had been rough. The only thing he took to was music, and it really appeared as if the boy had an inborn passion for it. Neighbours said it was a pity that he couldn't have good training, but that was out of the question. Jack was a rough-an'-ready lad, and rough work fitted him better than clerical employment; but music has a refining influence and, after a time, under the combined influence of the music and Belle's society, his manners altered.

But Mrs. Hassell's health failed and she was taken to an infirmary, from which she was afterwards drafted to a Home. The little household was broken up; Belle and her brother going to lodge with someone else in the next street, and Jack making arrangements with his chum's mother to board him.

Belle had to wait a long time before she obtained an opportunity of doing Jack a good turn, but it came at last, as she herself has just mentioned.

"Miss Lawrence," said Madame as the girl entered. "Come along, please! I want you to put on this skirt; you are just about Mrs. Milner's height. The train is too long and she couldn't wait, so you must put it on while we mark how to shorten it. She wants it quickly. Very impulsive woman, she is! Never seems to have time to spare for anything!"

Belle stood erect while Madame and the first skirt hand, Miss Cliff, arranged the offending garment about her graceful figure. She was a budding woman and the satin skirt became her.

Madame left them to finish, intending to return in order to supervise, but a moment later she sent in for Miss Cliff, who obeyed the call at once, leaving Belle standing in the satin skirt.

The girl surveyed herself in the mirror and blushed prettily as she suddenly caught herself indulging in a little self-admiration. She turned her head away, but her thoughts wandered and she came to herself as she found that she was again looking in the mirror and that another form was also reflected therein.

"Jack!" she cried involuntarily, turning hastily to the young fellow, who was standing just behind her. "You mustn't come here!"

"I had to bring a parcel into this room, so I have a right to be here!" he remarked with a low laugh. "I say, Belle, you may call it flattery if you like, as you did the other day, but I can't help it! You're as pretty as—oh, I've forgotten the name of that statue, but it doesn't matter! You are pretty, and that's the plain truth. If you hadn't turned round, I should have looked at you all day."

"Don't be foolish, Jack, please don't, and go away!" she pleaded, anxious but not displeased. "I shall have the girls talking about us again!"

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It appeared to be pleasing to Jack to learn that they were coupled by others, but he quickly realised that it was not fair to the girl.

"I'm very sorry, Belle," he said contritely. "I'll be off, but I must come round and see you this evening. I'm engaged to play in a concert and—that is, I want to talk to you about—what the girls say!"

There was great love in the eyes of the lad and Belle saw it. "Lad's love" some might have called it, scoffingly, but with him it was the beginning of a man's love. Belle, fingering the skirt in her excitement, gave a little cry; her hand had touched something which had been left in the pocket of the skirt. Not knowing what she was doing, she drew it out and saw that it was a purse.

"I say, that's been left in the pocket by the lady!" cried Jack, opening his eyes. "Better put it back and say nothing."

The door creaked as it opened. Belle hurriedly thrust the purse back into the pocket and Jack skipped lightly towards the door and assumed the air of one in considerable haste to do his work. Both were confused, and Belle, in her agitation, forgot to mention the fact that a purse was in the pocket.

The arrangement for shortening the dress was not of long duration now and Belle was in her chair in a few minutes, stitching away for dear life, as it seemed.

It was past eight before Belle reached home that evening, but she had hardly taken off her things before Jack Hassell arrived. Belle's brother welcomed Jack enthusiastically; he liked to hear the music and Jack had brought his violin.

"I'll leave you two," said Belle, "while I do a few odd things upstairs. I shall be down directly."

"Belle," cried her brother, "I have something to tell you! Oh, it will do when you come down, though!"

When she came back, she declared that Bob look fatigued and must go to bed. Bob demurred at first, but ultimately gave in and was helped upstairs by Belle and there he told her what had happened during the afternoon.

If Jack had counted on a quiet half hour with Belle, he was disappointed, for they were surprised by the sound of wheels stopping outside the door and a moment later the bell was pulled energetically. Mrs. Halliday, the landlady, answered the ring and unceremoniously ushered Madame Brunetti and Miss Cliff into the presence of the young couple.

The two visitors glanced at Belle and Jack and then at each other.

"Hum!" coughed Miss Cliff significantly. Madame's features assumed a sterner expression.

"I am here on an important errand, Miss Lawrence!" said Madame coldly. "Some money is missing and suspicion rests on you. I am bound to say that those suspicions receive some confirmation from the fact that you two are here together!"

Belle went pale and Jack's fists began to move uneasily.

"You had to try Mrs. Milner's dress on this afternoon," pursued Madame, before Belle could reply. "That skirt never went out of the hands of Miss Cliff and myself the whole time, except for five minutes! With the exception of that short time, my eyes were on that skirt the whole afternoon—all the while that Miss Cliff was engaged in shortening it and until it was delivered into Mrs. Milner's own hands. I took it to her myself, because I wished to be very attentive. Now, Mrs. Milner declares that there was a purse in the pocket containing two sovereigns and some silver, and a German silver coin which she prized highly. She had placed the purse in her pocket because she intended to wear the dress, but she changed her mind. She forgot to take the purse out. The purse was in the pocket when she examined the alteration in my presence, but the money was gone. It was only a tiny purse, so that's how it escaped Miss Cliff's notice."

"Then you mean——" began Belle.

"I mean that it will be better for you to give up the money and we will let the matter drop. I have no desire to prosecute you, although I cannot, of course, take you back in my employ!" said Madame stiffly.

"I did not take it!" cried Belle, indignantly.

"It's false!" exclaimed Jack, standing by the side of the girl and preparing to defend her.

"Do you deny that you knew there was a purse in the dress?" asked Miss Cliff, speaking for the first time and making a random shot. "Ah!" she cried as she noted the look that came over their faces. "Of course you knew it was there!"

"You were both in the room by yourselves, and you knew the purse was in the pocket," said Madame icily. "Your looks betray your guilt! Give me the money and consider that you are both out of a situation!"

Belle and Jack protested indignantly, and if there had been any chance of Jack's retaining his situation in Madame Brunetti's establishment he would certainly have lost that chance by his warm, not to say excited, defence of Belle. As to his own defence, he contented himself with the statement that he knew nothing of the contents of the purse.

"I have spent nothing since I left work this evening," said Belle. "I have only a few pence in my pocket. You are at liberty to search the place if you like. I can only say that I am innocent of this dreadful accusation."

"Of course she is!" declared Jack. "Anyone can see that! It's a thorough shame to come here and make such a charge! I'd sooner believe you took it yourself!"

"Don't, please don't!" whispered Belle, fearing that the energetic championship would injure rather than help her, although she was otherwise proud and glad to have such a friend at hand.

Madame flushed angrily at Jack's words.

"Do you deny that you knew there was a purse in the dress?"

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"I daresay I shall be able to find proof sooner or later!" she cried petulantly. "I shouldn't be at all surprised to find the gold hidden away in something here!" In her anger, she went to the mantelpiece and began to shake the small vases. To the surprise of Belle and Jack, something rattled in one of them. Madame unceremoniously turned it upside down and out fell two sovereigns.

"I thought you were both very innocent!" sneered Madame. "Here is the gold and you have spent the silver; I suppose you will be telling me that you came straight home, and that you can produce all the shopkeepers along the route to prove you didn't purchase anything, or something equally absurd?"

"I didn't come straight home," said Belle helplessly, not knowing how the remark would be turned.

"Oh, it's clear as possible!" declared Madame haughtily. "You disposed of the silver—gave it to this boy, your companion in crime, no doubt! Well, let this be a warning to you, and think yourselves lucky that I did not have you arrested!"

She motioned arrogantly to Miss Cliff to follow her and swept out of the room. A minute later, Belle and Jack heard the sound of wheels.

"Whoever could have been wicked enough to put it there?" cried Belle, dropping into a chair and sobbing hysterically.

"It's like a conspiracy!" asserted Jack dejectedly. "But I don't see who did it! If Miss Cliff had touched the vases, I could have understood it."

Who could have done it? Bob's story was repeated to Jack, and it seemed to throw light on the mystery. He had been left alone in the house during the afternoon; being hot and tired of lying on the couch, he had got on his feet with the aid of crutches and had struggled to the window, which was open. As he appeared at the window, an elderly lady passed and, probably attracted by the wan face, had gazed lengthily at him; in trying to turn so as to avoid her gaze, he had slipped and hurt himself against the window frame.

The benevolent-looking lady had observed the tumble and, the street door having been left open, had entered and done what she could to relieve him. The question now was: "Had she slipped the two sovereigns into the vase?"

All three felt confident that she had, but could they find her in order to prove it?

Jack and Belle made all possible search and inquiry, but to no purpose, and they had to give up and face the difficulties of their position. They were without work and debarred from obtaining situations for want of a reference. Belle did a little dressmaking on her own account, but she did not succeed in obtaining sufficient to enable her to keep up her lodgings and she and her brother had to retire to a poorer neighbourhood, where she hired a small room. Jack did his best to get work and, failing regular employment, picked up a precarious living by doing odd jobs and occasionally playing his violin in the busiest streets in the evening.

Several months passed and things went from bad to worse with Belle; the weight of the unjust accusation and a hard life in a locality that was not congenial resulted in an illness which would have left the sister and brother destitute but for the loving care of Jack Hassell. He threw aside all feelings of pride and worked at anything honest; no matter what it was, he would do it in order to earn money to support his sweetheart—that was what he called her, although nothing had been said on either side. He earned most by his violin, however, and he fiddled away in the market streets to earn the coppers and take them to Belle.

Life was very dark to Belle just then, but it was cheered by the love of Jack, and that trial proved to be the darkest hour that comes before the dawn. Unable to get an odd job one day, Jack took his violin and went afield to a semi-fashionable locality to play. He played some old songs—such as "Annie Laurie"—and his attention was arrested at the conclusion of one song by a window being thrown up and a coin dropping at his feet. He looked at the window to see who the donor was and he gave a start of surprise. There sat a little lady, beaming benevolently at him, exactly in the manner described by Bob in the account of his strange visitor! Jack looked intently, remembering Bob's words and forgetting the silver coin.

"I believe she is the very one!" he gasped. "Oh, if she is! I must find out!"

He picked up the coin without looking at it and went straight to the steps leading to the front door. As he reached it, the door was opened by a maid.

"I was just coming after you!" she cried. "Mistress has thrown out a coin that she wants to keep—some old thing that she has taken a fancy to!"

"Bring him inside, Susan!" cried the old lady from within. "He was bringing it back! A very honest young fellow!"

"This is good!" muttered Jack with a touch of humour. "I was called a thief when I didn't steal anything, and now I'm very honest for taking back a coin that I'd no intention of taking back. Well, it gets me an introduction!"

Jack made no pretence, however. He owned that his object was not to restore the coin, for the reason that he had not looked at it, but to ask a question. Then he asked the benevolent lady if, on a certain day, she was going down a certain street and saw a boy at a window—and so on.

"I remember it!" cried the lady. "What about it?"

The little lady's distress was great on learning that her act of secret charity had helped to cause so much mischief.

"I will take steps to clear up the matter at once!" she said decisively. "I'll have a cab at once and go to the boy and his sister, and then to Madame Brunetti! Of course, I can't solve the mystery of the disappearance of the money, but I can clear you both to an extent. Oh, have you got that coin?"

Jack handed it over.

"Yes, yes," continued the lady. "That coin completes my collection of old German money. I must put it back; I took it out this morning to show a friend and I nearly lost it you see!"

"Yes, ma'am!" said Jack, for want of something to say.

"I bought it on the very day after I slipped those two sovereigns into the vase. I was so glad to get it! Mr. Spokes has been on the look-out for such a specimen for me during the past three years—it isn't very valuable, but I wanted it!"

Jack only heard part of the speech.

"Madame said there was an old German coin in that purse!" he cried. "I wonder——"

"If so," said the old lady, reading his thoughts, "we may catch the real thief! We'll see Mr. Spokes about that!"

Benevolent Mrs. Barrington did not do things by halves. She was busy for the next three or four hours, Jack being with her all the time. She went straight to Belle and made arrangements for the comfort of Bob and his sister. She next paid a visit to Madame Brunetti, where she explained the presence of the two sovereigns in the vase; then she went to Mrs. Milner, showed her the German coin and received a positive assurance that it was the one stolen from her. From Mrs. Milner to the shop of Mr. Spokes, and then, to the surprise of Jack, Mr. Spokes took a seat with them in the four-wheeler and they went back to Madame Brunetti.

"The description you give of the seller of that coin to you, Mr. Spokes," said Mrs. Barrington, "tallies so much with that of an employee of Madame Brunetti, that I wish you to see her!"

The young woman in question proved to be Miss Cliff, who reeled and grasped a heavy chair for support when she entered and found herself confronted by Mr. Spokes.

"I recognise her!" said that gentleman drily. "I think there is no need for me to say more!"

Miss Cliff confessed to having extracted the money from the purse while Madame was not looking, and begged abjectly for mercy. She was dismissed at once. Madame wished to reinstate Belle and Jack, but Mrs. Barrington said that she had other plans. She took Belle into her own household, sent Bob to an institution where he would have expert treatment, and placed Jack in a musical college.

There is to be a wedding soon, and the bridegroom is spoken of as a coming musician.

George Day.

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- A - Deal in Journalism.

Telling of an Editress, an Author, and a Paper.

She was the editress of a smart ladies' weekly, and chanced furthermore to be a brunette, a dazzling beauty. He was an author of repute, and a splendid specimen of well-groomed English manhood.

They had met at the house of a mutual friend a month or so prior to the production of *Feminine Fancies* which, being published to supply an alleged long felt want, was destined to revolutionise the literary world—always supposing that it existed long enough to do so.

As to the latter supposition proving to be a correct one, Iris Berenger had no doubt, especially since Nigel Wallace, taken by her piquante loveliness, had agreed to write the opening serial at a figure which, had he but known, would have caused the editor of the *Metropolitan Magazine*, with whom he had contracted, to wriggle on his chair with envy,

As it was, noting the name of Nigel Wallace beneath the serial, he concluded that *Feminine Fancies* had a substantial financial backing, a belief which was substantiated by Wallace's reticence on the subject, when he tackled him on the matter.

"Oh, yes," he replied, smiling amusedly when he remembered that his account was four weeks overdue. "I am getting a very fair screw, thanks."

"It's the best thing you have done so far," grumbled Williams. "It beats ours hollow."

"As does their screw yours," laughed Wallace, as he left the editorial sanctum.

In the street, the smile deepened. For a moment he stood on the kerb, then, hailing a hansom, he stepped inside, saying as he did so:

"The F.F. Publishing Co., Ltd., Fetter Lane."

The smile intensified, as, leaning back in the hansom, he waited till it pulled up in front of the offices of *Feminine Fancies*.

"Is Miss Berenger in?" Wallace inquired of the commissionaire.

"Yes, sir," he answered, with a grin. "The whole staff's in—preparing the double number."

An audible titter broke from the lips of two messenger boys, who lounged in the hall-way.

Wallace heard the sardonic merriment and knew the significance of it. As he had guessed, the journal had run its course, and salaries were evidently owing.

Outwardly he was placid, inwardly he foamed, though his calm, immobile features did not betray by a single twitch the tempest of fury which raged within.

"Kindly inform Miss Berenger that I should like to see her," His accents were so frigid that the tittering behind him ceased abruptly.

"Yes, sir." The commissionaire forgot his facetiousness, as he telephoned the novelist's name to the editorial realms. For a moment he listened, then added, "Miss Berenger says, will you write?"

"I am afraid that there will not be time," he said gravely. "Will you kindly tell Miss Berenger that I shall only keep her a moment. My business is re next week's instalment of the serial. I think that she may see me if you tell her that."

"All right, sir," grinned the man, as, calling the telephone again into requisition, he bellowed into the receiver, "Mr. Wallace wants to see you about next week's instalment of the serial."

Wallace could have cheerfully broken his neck at that moment. As it was, he merely flung the best end of his cigar with unnecessary violence, into the middle of the street. The commissionaire was irritating in his ill-timed levity.

"Miss Berenger says, will you step up," the man remarked with a yawn, as leaning back in his box, he took a well-thumbed daily from a ledge beside him and commenced to read it.

Wallace did not reply, but raced up the stairs two steps at a time till he stood outside the editorial room. He tapped at the door, and, receiving an invitation to enter, did so.

"Good afternoon, Miss Berenger!" he said, easily, as he crossed the room to where she sat at her desk. "As I chanced to be in the vicinity, I thought that I would drop in myself and give you the next instalment of my serial personally. I wanted to speak to you on a few matters."

He bent his keen, grey eyes on her searchingly as he spoke, to find that her gaze faltered before his, whilst a dull flush mounted to her temples.

"You—you have come for the cheque—which I owe you?" she suggested, timidly, tugging nervously at a stray bit of ribbon, depending from the wrist of her dainty blouse. "I know that I ought to—to—have sent it before, but——" She paused, then added quickly—"How much does the account work out at, Mr. Wallace?"

"Thirty-two pounds," he replied briskly, gazing at the ceiling. "That, of course, includes the present instalment, which I have brought with me." Wallace placed a roll of neatly-written M.S. on the desk before her.

"Thirty-two pounds!" she echoed helplessly, her eyes brimming with tears. "I—I had no idea—I owed you so much?"

"No?" he laughed, easily, glancing at her out of the corner of his eye the while. "You asked for the last two instalments to be close on three thousand words longer, did you not?"

She nodded her head mutely.

"Hence the increase of the account," he said lightly, gazing smilingly at the face she turned to his, and reading its dumb helplessness. "Do you chance to have the advance of number twelve? I forget if Enock got out at Charing Cross or the Temple to pick up that clue."

A grey look stole over the pretty face before him, which had lost all its mutinous beauty.

"An advance copy!" she said huskily, her lips commencing to quiver ominously.

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"A galley pull will do," he replied mercilessly, seating himself in a comfortable arm-chair at the corner of the desk.

A silence followed his remark. A silence so tense, that the ticking of the tiny timepiece on Iris Berenger's desk, alone broke the stillness, till its feeble sound was drowned by the echo of a woman's sob.

"I—I don't think that there will—be a number—twelve," she said quiveringly. "I—I am awaiting a telegram from—a gentleman before whom I put the matter. If I get a wire from him—all will be well. If not—I shall be bankrupt and have to——"

Her voice broke, and he remained silent.

"Well," he said abruptly. "When is this telegram likely to turn up?"

"You don't believe me?" she faltered, glancing at him with brimming eyes.

"I never said that I did not," he remarked quietly. "But I am an eminently business man, and *Feminine Fancies* owes me thirty-two pounds!"

"You shall be paid—every farthing!" she said abruptly.

"*If* the telegram turns up," he said, whimsically.

"Without that condition, Mr. Wallace."

"How? There will be other creditors besides myself."

"I—I shall sell up—my—flat!" she faltered, her accents dying away in a whisper.

Feminine endurance has its limit, and she had reached hers. As the last word left her lips her courage vanished. Hot, scalding tears, which no effort of will on her part could control, splashed down on the hands which nervously gripped the desk before her.

In an instant the smile vanished from his face, as rising from his chair, he laid his hand on her shoulder, saying, in a voice which was strangely unlike his own—

"Miss Berenger. Please don't think that I came here to worry you about my cheque. If I spoke to you bluntly a few moments ago it was only that you should be able to appreciate your position in this affair."

"Do you think that I have not been able to do that for a month past?" she interrupted bitterly, dashing the tears angrily from her eyes.

"All the better then, for I have a business proposition to make."

"A business proposition to make?" she echoed, wonderingly.

"Precisely," he said, drily. "I believe that there is a future in front of this little paper, and that being so, I propose to finance it."

"Mr. Wallace!" Iris Berenger started to her feet in surprise. "*You!*"

"Exactly! Always supposing that you are agreeable to the arrangement," he said, smiling.

"Of course, you would not let me continue to edit it, I suppose?" she said, wistfully. "You want the journal free of all conditions. I am not in a position to impose them. I accept your proposal."

"Good," he said, briskly. "Then I will have the deed confirming the sale drawn up by my solicitors to-morrow. As to the editorship, I don't think I should want you to do that!"

He spoke thoughtfully.

"You do not consider me sufficiently capable in that capacity?" she said, colouring.

He flushed.

"It isn't that," he cried, impetuously. "I—oh, Iris, it is no use beating about the bush! I love you, dear, and if I don't want you to be the editress of this paper, it is because I want you to be my wife! I am not going to have your little head bothered with business worries, if I can—that is, if you will let me prevent it."

"But——" she hesitated, then raised her eyes, bright still with tears, to his.

A strange light illumined them, a sudden wealth of love and pleading looking up at him from their velvet depths.

"Let there be no 'buts' dearest," he said, hoarsely, as he ventured to draw her slim figure to his. "I have loved you from the very first moment I saw you at the Soulby's 'At Home,' and I have loved you ever since. I have had it on my tongue to tell you this a score of times, yet have somehow or other always failed to do so. I was afraid that I might lose you if I were too precipitate.

"I love you, darling, love you as man has never yet loved woman! I want you to resign your position as editress of this paper in favour of that which will be yours as my wife! Will you, Iris, darling?" he cried pleadingly, as drawing her slender figure to his he rained passionate kisses on her resistless lips. "Will you, dearest?"

A flash of her old mutinous defiance leapt into her eyes, to fade, as burying her face against his shoulder she shyly whispered:

"I think that I will hand in my resignation, dear, and——"

An impetuous kiss stayed her further utterance, and before she could speak again a knock at the office door caused them to start aside as though in guilty confusion.

"Come in," she said, quickly.

In answer to the summons the door was pushed open, and the Commissionaire walked in.

"Mr. Griffin, the paper man, is here, and wants his cheque," he said insolently. "And it's about time he got it, I reckon."

"Send him up," said Wallace frigidly, eyeing the man before him, as he placed his hands behind his back. "Jones, there are going to be some changes in this paper before the week is out. Oddly enough, you are going to be the first one! Your talents are lost in this office, and such being the case, I have decided that you shall leave next Saturday."

The Commissionaire stared surprisedly at the novelist, who, fixing a monocle in his eye, looked fixedly at him.

"Thank you for nothing!" he said defiantly. "I don't need no notice when the paper's a dead un!"

"That is where you make the mistake," replied Wallace coolly. "I will trouble you to kindly inform those two errand boys below that their services will be dispensed with after next Saturday as well."

"Who are you to give orders, I'd like to know, in this office?" retorted the man, insolently.

"Who am I?" replied Wallace, placidly. "I am the new proprietor."

Tristram K. Monck.

Ten Gramophones for Ten Sentences.

It is quite the exception to find people who don't like music; there are many who are fond of it, but yet either cannot make it themselves or if they can are not able to afford to buy a piano or other musical instrument. To such, a Gramophone would be an inestimable boon. The only thing you have to do to get the sound is to put in the record of the song or piece you want to hear and then set the machine in motion.

Each Gramophone we are giving away is accompanied by two records, and is fitted with a Concert Sound-Box, which greatly increases the volume of sound.

You can win a Gramophone by writing on the back of a post-card the best and longest sentence you can in which the last letter of one word is the first letter of the next. For example: Racing (g) ives (s) ome (e) ducated (d) onkeys (s) erious (s) orrow.

A Gramophone will be given to each of the ten readers who submit the best sentences.

Post-cards only must be addressed to the SAME LETTER EDITOR, *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., to arrive not later than first post on Tuesday, March 3rd.

The Editor's decision is final, and competitors may only enter on that understanding.

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Plenty of Encouragement.

"Has she given you any encouragement?" "Oh, yes! She says she will get all her father's money some day."

It Was so Sudden.

Frank Frankleigh: "Yes, Miss Antique, to be frank with you——" Miss Antique (with a chirp): "Oh, Mr. Frankleigh, of course you may be Frank with me—but this is so sudden."

A Penetrating Voice.

Mr. Wickwire: "What is that woman across the way trying to sing?" Mrs. Wickwire: "'My Sweetheart's the Man in the Moon.'" Mr. Wickwire: "Well, if he doesn't hear her it isn't her fault."

He Knew the Look of Paste.

Mrs. Shears (in a jeweller's shop buying diamonds): "I wish my husband were here." Jeweller: "Is he an authority on diamonds, madam?" Mrs. Shears: "Not exactly; he is an editor, and knows paste whenever he sees it."

No Need for Alarm.

Father: "I am inexpressibly shocked. Your mother tells me that you are engaged to three young men." Daughter: "Don't alarm yourself, papa. They are all football players, and when the season closes I can marry the survivor, you know."

What the Initials Meant.

Angelina: "That was a lovely engagement ring you gave me last night, dear; but what do those initials, 'E. C.' mean on the inside?" Edwin (who had bestowed the ring before, and had it back): "Why—er—that—is—don't you know that is the new way of stamping eighteen carats?"

Hard Work Selling It.

She: "Do you know, Mr. Smithy, you painters are a perfect enigma to me. You work about a month in twelve, turn out one picture or so, and then seem perfectly satisfied. What you do during the other eleven months, goodness only knows! I don't." He: "You'd soon learn, though, if you'd the said picture to sell."

He Interrupted Her.

"No, George," faltered the maiden. "I fear it cannot be. I admire you as a gentleman, I respect you as a friend, but—" "Laura!" he exclaimed, "before you pass sentence, hear me out. A recent lucky stroke in business has enabled me to buy a beautiful house in Kensington, which shall be in your name. I will insure my life for ten thousand pounds, and——" "George," calmly interposed the lovely girl, "you interrupted me. I was about to say that the sentiments of respect and esteem I feel for you, though so strong, are feeble in comparison with the deep love which I—which I—which I have long—don't, George, dear." For George had interrupted her again.

Other Things to Think About.

She: "Do you think of me as much as you did?" Cholly: "No, not quite. I'm raising a moustache now."

Only Her Bonnet.

He: "My dear, here's someone with the green-groceries." She: "Those are not vegetables. That's my new bonnet."

An Incriminating Question.

She: "Do you make love to every girl you know, as you do to me?" Young Lawyer: "My dear young lady, you should not ask a question that would tend to incriminate the witness."

Good Value for Money.

She (on the honeymoon): "I suppose, George, it must have cost a lot of money to build a railway like this?" He: "Oh, yes. The tunnels alone cost a million or so—but they're worth every penny of it."

Complimentary!

Mrs. Hard: "Do have some more cream, Miss Sweetooth!" Miss Sweetooth (hesitatingly): "Well, just a little, Mrs. Hard. Only a mouthful." Mrs. Hard: "Bridget, fill Miss Sweetooth's plate up again."

That Troublesome Cook.

Mrs. Newed: "We will have to have a speaking tube from the dining-room to the kitchen." Mr. Newed: "Why?" Mrs. Newed: "Well—I must get some way of talking to the cook without having her throw dishes at me."

Wanted the Lot.

He was a buyer in a large wholesale house, and he was in love. One night he snatched a kiss. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "I am so well pleased with this sample that I should like to negotiate for all you have." He was accepted on the spot.

The Only Thing to be Done.

She: "Just think, Edgar, I ordered the dressmaker to make me a dress for the street, and she has sent me a travelling costume instead." He: "Well, what are you going to do about it?" She: "All we can do is to take a trip abroad."

How He Satisfied His Wants.

Romantic Miss: "Have there not been moments in your experience when life seemed full of unsatisfied wants?" Mr. Hardhead: "Y-e-s, that's so." "At such times I always fly to music for relief. What do you do, Mr. Hardhead?" "I advertise."

Bargain in Telegrams.

There was a vivacious smile on her face which was winsome. "Oh, dear me," she murmured happily, "I've just got such a bargain!" "How, dear?" inquired her friend. "I sent a telegram—only sixpence for twelve words, and at least six of them were words of more than three syllables!"

Rather Mixed.

"I don't know what you ever saw in me to admire, she remarked demurely. "Oh, well, you know, little one, a fellow who *is* anything doesn't look for mere beauty in a girl. It's——" He stopped, because his heart was all right; and, besides, he wasn't entirely a born fool—only impetuous and thoughtless in his way.

Quaker Wooing.

"Martha, dost thou love me?" said a young Quaker. "Why, Seth, we are commanded to love one another." "Ah, Martha, but dost thou feel what the world calls love?" "I hardly know what to tell thee, Seth. I have tried to bestow my love upon all, but I have sometimes thought perhaps that thou wast getting more than thy share."

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OUR SPLENDID SERIAL.

THE ALBERT GATE MYSTERY.

A Romance of To-day.

By LOUIS TRACY.

Author of "The Final War," "The Lost Lady Delia," etc.

Talbot's Adventures.

Although Miss Talbot spoke so confidently of revelations that should accompany the expected meal, it is idle to pretend that any of the three people who were cognisant of Talbot's mysterious appearance on the island betrayed undue haste to return to the waiting launch.

Sublimely unconscious of the excitement raging in their breasts Sir Hubert Fitzjames could not understand why they each and all answered him in such a flurried manner when he dilated upon the beauties of the bay. Finally he turned to Edith with an air of apprehension.

"I fear," he said, "that your expedition of last night has upset you. Have you a headache?"

Then she could contain her news no longer. Drawing him close to the rampart, and bending down so as to apparently take a deep interest in the laughing excursionists beneath, she murmured:

"Listen to me carefully, uncle. Upon no account look round. Have you noticed the party of Turks and a Frenchman grouped together in the opposite corner?"

"Yes," he said. "You do not mean to tell me that they are the people whom Mr. Brett met this morning at the station?"

"Yes, unquestionably they are. Had your attention not been otherwise taken up you must have recognised them from their description. But the most marvellous thing remains. You know the little turret close to which they are standing?"

"Yes."

"Well, in the staircase leading to the top, and leaning out through a window, trying to hear what they are saying, is Jack!"

"What an extraordinary thing," said the major-general, who was really very annoyed that such a meeting should have taken place under his very nose and yet its significance should remain hidden from him.

"Can we do anything?" he added.

"Nothing save to remain here a little while longer and be most careful not to appear to have the least knowledge of their identity. I have told you lest we might chance to meet Jack face to face, and you should be taken by surprise if you recognised him."

"Is he in disguise, then?" gasped her uncle.

"Yes, in a sense. Mr. Brett has put him into a sort of French working-man's holiday suit. He looks so odd, but it is evident that neither Grosjean nor the Turks have the least suspicion of his presence. It was very clever of Jack to get into that turret without alarming them."

They were joined by Daubeney and Fairholme, and Edith knew by a single glance at the expressive expanse of the former's face that, should he be again brought into close proximity to the Turks and her brother, it was quite possible the quick-witted Grosjean might detect the look of interested amazement which must inevitably appear upon his honest British countenance.

"Bobby," she said at once, "I want you and Mr. Daubeney to go down to the launch and await us there. We will join you in a few minutes."

"Certainly," was the reply, for Fairholme knew that some motive lay behind the request. "You cannot do much by remaining here, can you, so I suppose you will not be long?"

"No; uncle and I will survey the view until it is firmly fixed in our minds. After that it is full steam ahead for the Hotel du Louvre."

The two young men disappeared down the stairs leading to the courtyard. On their way they encountered a number of holiday makers, climbing up to the top of the tower. In they came, twenty or more of them, and promptly spread themselves around the walls, the Marseillais amongst them indicating to their country cousins points of interest in the city and around the coast.

At this moment, too, the siren of the small pleasure steamer at the quay announced she was about to make her hourly trip back to the town. Whereupon Grosjean and the Turks, having apparently ended their consultation, crossed the roof and disappeared down the staircase.

Instantly Jack Talbot strolled after them, but no sooner had the bulky form of Grosjean—who was the last of his party—vanished than Talbot ran towards his uncle and sister, and said rapidly:

"Dubois and the girl have gone to Palermo. Grosjean and the Turks have been in communication with the Sultan, and there is a movement on foot to buy back the diamonds. That is all that I can tell you now, but let Mr. Brett know. When I have seen these chaps safely home, I will at once come to the hotel."

Then he, too, vanished.

Edith felt a thrill of elation that her good judgment should have led her to remain sufficiently long on the tower to glean such important information.

When Brett heard the news it seemed to annoy him.

"I feared as much," he said. "I had not much faith in the patriotism of the young Turks. I wonder how much the Sultan has offered. It must be a severe wrench for him to dip his hands into his money-bags, and Dubois will certainly demand a handsome figure before he disgorges his booty. However, we must possess our souls in peace until Talbot comes here and tells us all that he has learnt. At this moment I cannot help marvelling at the strange coincidence which should have led the Turks and yourself to select the Château d'If for a morning stroll. I fully expected

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that Grosjean would be in bed. He must have received some startling intelligence to keep him away from his rest after a long journey. Meanwhile, I have not been idle."

Every one awaited with interest his next words, for Brett seldom made such a remark without having something out of the common to communicate.

"I telephoned to Paris," he explained, "to tell the prefecture that Grosjean and the Turks had arrived at Marseilles. The police were surprised, and perhaps a little sore, that they had not discovered the fact for themselves, but when I soothed them down they informed me that 'Le Ver'—the diminutive scoundrel whom we rescued from the Rue Barbette—had faithfully kept his appointment with me at the Grand Hotel yesterday.

"It seems that he was much upset when he learnt that I had left. He went straight to the commissary to inform him that, contrary to expectations, the Turks were acting in complete accord with mademoiselle's father. This naturally puzzled the commissary a good deal, and the affair became still stranger when an attaché from the Turkish Embassy called a little later and urged the police to do all in their power to discover the whereabouts of Hussein ul Mulk, as he was particularly anxious to have a friendly talk with him.

"Close on the heels of the Turk came a confidential messenger from the British Embassy, requesting the latest details and, when questioned by the commissary, this man admitted that he had in the first instance called to see me at the Grand Hotel.

"In a word, Miss Talbot, I had suspected the existence of the negotiations, which your brother's smart piece of work this morning has confirmed."

Whilst they were talking Fairholme took Daubeney on one side, and with Brett's permission gave him a detailed account of the whole affair.

The Honourable James Daubeney was delighted to be mixed up in this international imbroglio. He told the earl that the *Blue-Bell* was at his disposal at any moment of the day or night she might be required. Indeed, he forthwith excused himself on the ground that certain little formalities were requisite before he could clear the harbour, and he must hurry off to attend to these immediately.

"I tell you what," he added, with his hand on the door, "I will come back and dine with you, if I may, at half-past seven, because I shall not sleep to-night until I hear how things are going on. But I promise you, if I meet a single Turk between here and the harbour, I will cross over to the other side of the street."

No one quite knew what he meant by this portentous guarantee, but it was evident that Daubeney, if nothing else, was a man of action, and his yacht might become very useful.

He had hardly quitted the hotel when a waiter announced that a young Frenchman wished to see Mr. Brett.

"Show him up," said the barrister, and a moment later Talbot entered. He stood near the door twiddling his hat in his hand until the waiter had gone. Then he told them what had happened since he took up his quarters at the Hotel des Jolies Femmes.

"When I got there," he said, "I was under the impression that Grosjean and the Turks were in bed. I hired my room, sent my tin box there, and then settled myself in the café to smoke cigarettes and read these vile Marseilles newspapers until lunch time. You may judge my surprise when I saw the three Turks and Grosjean come out into the street and ask a waiter the way to the post-office.

"They set off, and, being sure of their destination, I did not quit the café myself until they were well out of sight. Then I walked away in the same direction, inquired of a policeman the quickest way to reach the post-office, and stepped out rapidly.

"I had not gone far when I overtook them. They reached the building. The Turks remained in the street and Grosjean went inside, so I followed him and found him inquiring for letters at the Poste Restante department. Whereupon I sent a telegram to London."

"Who on earth did you telegraph to, Jack?" broke in Edith.

"To my shirt-maker, telling him to put a couple of dozens in hand at once."

This unexpected answer evoked a general titter.

"The funny thing to me," said Talbot, "was the effect of the message on the telegraph clerk. He could evidently read English, and he surveyed me curiously, for in my present appearance I looked a most unlikely person to order shirts by telegram from a well-known London house. However, I achieved my purpose, which was to overhear Grosjean's request. He asked if there were any letters for M. Isidor de Rion."

"Good gracious," cried Edith, "what a swell name for that fat man."

The Race.

"Well, anyhow it was effective. There was a letter for him, and he evidently only expected one, for, before the clerk who handed it to him was able to examine the remainder of the packet, he tore it open, glanced briefly at its contents, and then hurried out to join his friends in the street. After a short conclave they entered a café and procured a railway guide. I tried hard to find out what section of the book Grosjean was looking at, but failed, for the double reason that he did not consult the Turks, nor did he seem to make up his mind, for he looked through the book, sighed impatiently and suggested to the others that they should go out again. I followed them into the Cannebière, and thence down towards the harbour. When we reached the quay a small pleasure steamer was whistling for passengers, and a placard announced a fifty-centimes return trip to the Chateau d'If.

"Seemingly on the spur of the moment, Grosjean invited the others to accompany him. It probably occurred to him that the island would supply a safe nook in which they could talk without fear of observation, as their presence on board the steamer would stamp them as excursionists. So, of course, I followed them. When we reached the island, I quickly perceived that the castle filled the whole of it. Therefore, in place of keeping behind them I went in front. We all passed on with the stream of sightseers until we reached the court-yard.

"I had never been in the place before, but Grosjean seemed to know it well. Owing to my policy of preceding them I found myself halted for a moment at the foot of the stairs leading to the tower. It struck me that the Frenchman was making in this direction, so I took the chance and ran up. I reached the top and looked over before the party had entered the doorway at the bottom. They came in. Thus far I was right. I looked around, and found, as you know, the square roof surrounded by bare battlements with a turret in one corner.

"I decided instantly that it would be hopeless to try to get close to them if they halted at any other point save in the vicinity of the turret. Elsewhere I must remain too far away to catch any portion of their conversation. So I darted across and entered the turret, noting on my way up the stairs the existence of the loopholed window where you finally saw me.

"It would never do to be caught there, so I went to the top and peeped over. You can guess how delighted I was when they came straight across and settled themselves in the angle beneath. Then I crept halfway down the stairs and leant as far as I dared through the loophole, being just in time to hear Grosjean read a letter from his daughter.

"The letter was quite short. It told him that H. had decided to leave France, and had made arrangements to proceed at once to Palermo, whither the writer would accompany him.

"One sentence I remember exactly: 'H.,' she wrote, 'has friends in Sicily, and he feels assured of a kind reception at their hands.'"

"Friends," interrupted Brett, "that means brigands!"

"The information seemed to annoy the Turks very much. They were very angry at what they described as the enforced delay, and discussed with Grosjean the quickest means of

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reaching Palermo forthwith. Then he told them that he had endeavoured to find out the trains running through Italy to Messina but they could not leave Marseilles until to-night, and he thought it best that they should have a quiet talk on the situation before deciding too hurriedly upon any line of action.

"The rest of their conversation was inconsequent and desultory, alluding evidently to some project which they had fully discussed before. But it is quite clear from the drift of their remarks that an emissary from the Sultan had approached Hussein ul Mulk, and had offered such terms for the recovery of the diamonds that not only were the Young Turkish party in Paris eager to compromise with him, but they had succeeded in convincing Grosjean that Dubois also would be likely to accept the proposition."

Brett smiled grimly. "The commissary in Paris always follows up the wrong person," he said. "Had he only used his wits yesterday morning he would have discovered that the agent of the Embassy got in touch with Hussein ul Mulk. Hence the presence of the quartette in Marseilles to-day."

Talbot was naturally mystified by this remark until Brett explained to him the circumstances already known to the reader.

"Was there anything else?" inquired the barrister, reverting to the chief topic before them.

"Only this. I gathered that Grosjean did not know his daughter's whereabouts in Marseilles, but she had arranged that if circumstances necessitated her departure from the town she would leave a letter for him in the Poste Restante, giving him full details. Nevertheless this presupposes the knowledge on her part that he would come to Marseilles, so I assume therefore that telegrams must have passed between them yesterday afternoon."

"Obviously!" said Brett. "Anything else?"

"Yes," and now Talbot's voice took a note of passion that momentarily surprised his hearers. "It seems to me that this underhanded arrangement, if it goes through, condones the murder of poor Mehemet Ali and his assistants, and places upon me the everlasting disgrace of having permitted this thing to happen, whilst an important and special mission was intrusted to my sole charge by the Foreign Office. Dubois has been able to commit his crime, get away with the diamonds, hoodwink all of us most effectually, and, in the result, obtain a huge reward from the Turkish Government for his services. I tell you, Mr. Brett, I won't put up with it. I will follow him to the other end of the world, and, at any rate, take personal vengeance upon the man who has ruined my career. For, no matter what you say, the only effective way in which I can rehabilitate myself with my superiors is to hand back those diamonds to the custody of the Foreign Office. No matter how the panic-stricken sovereign in Yildiz Kiosk may sacrifice his servants to gain his own ends, I, at least, have a higher motive. It rests upon my shoulders to prove that the British Government is not to be humbugged by Paris thieves or Turkish agitators. If I fail in that duty there remains to me the personal motive of revenge upon my betrayers."

"No, Edith; it is useless to argue with me," for his sister had risen and placed her arms lovingly round his neck in the effort to calm him. "My mind is made up. I suppose Mr. Brett feels that his inquiry is ended. For me it is just commenced."

The young man's justifiable rage created a sensation which was promptly allayed by Brett's cool voice.

"May I ask," he said, "what reason you have to suppose that I should so readily throw up the sponge and leave Monsieur Henri Dubois the victor in this contest?"

"Do you mean," cried Talbot, starting to his feet, "that you will stand by me?"

"Stand by you!" echoed the barrister, yielding himself for an instant to the electrical condition of things. "Of course I will. We will recover those diamonds and bring them back with us to London if we have to take them out of the Sultan's palace itself!

"And now, Lord Fairholme," he added, before Talbot could do other than grasp his hand and shake it impulsively, "we want your friend's yacht. We will set out for Palermo at the first possible moment. We must reach there many hours, perhaps a whole day before Dubois, who is on a sailing vessel, and even with the start he has obtained cannot hope to equal the performance of a fast steamer. Let Grosjean and his Turks travel overland. We will beat them, too. Come, now, no more talk, but action. You, Fairholme, go ahead and prepare Daubeney. I will see to your luggage being packed. Talbot and I will join you in half an hour."

"Eh! what is that?" broke in Sir Hubert. "Fairholme, Talbot, you—what are Edith and I going to do?"

"Mr. Brett, of course," said Edith, in her steady, even tones, "did not trouble to include us, uncle, because we shall be on the yacht first. A woman can always pack up much better than a man, you know, and I will look after you, dear."

Brett gave one glance at her flushed and smiling face, and forthwith abandoned argument as useless.

An hour later the *Blue-Bell* was skimming merrily past the outer lighthouse in Marseilles bay. For a wonder the Gulf of Lyons was not boisterous, so they had a pleasant journey through the night, and Daubeney assured them that his handsome yacht was doing twelve knots an hour without being pressed.

The next morning they reached the Straits of Bonifacio, and here they had to slacken speed somewhat, for the navigation of that rocky channel was difficult and dangerous. Far behind them they could see a huge steamer approaching. As the morning wore on this vessel came nearer, and Daubeney, important now in his capacity of commander, announced that she was the P. and O. steamship *Ganges*, bound for Brindisi and the East, *viâ* the Straits of Messina.

"She left Marseilles at a late hour last night," he said, "and will call at Brindisi for the Indian mails."

An idea suddenly struck Brett. "Do you know how fast she is steaming?" he inquired.

"Oh, about thirteen and a half knots an hour. That is her best rate. The P. and O. boats are not flyers, you know."

"And does she stop at Messina?"

Daubeney now caught the drift of the barrister's questions.

"No, I don't think so, but Macpherson, my chief engineer, will probably tell us."

Macpherson was produced, a bearded and grizzled personage, hailing from Dundee. Being a Scotsman he would not commit himself.

"I havena' hear-rd o' the P. and O. ships stoppin' at Messeena," he announced, "but aiblins they wad if they got their price." And "Mac" would not commit himself any further.

Another hour passed, and the *Ganges* was now almost alongside. Although both ships were well through the Straits of Bonifacio, and the *Ganges* should have followed a course a point or two north of that pursued by the *Blue-Bell*, she appeared to be desirous to come close to them.

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Suddenly the reason became apparent. A line of little flags fluttered up to her mast-head.

"She is signalling us," cried Daubeney excitedly. "Here you," he shouted to a sailor, "bring Jones here at once."

Jones was the yacht's expert signaller. He approached with a telescope and a code under his arm. After a prolonged gaze and a careful scrutiny of the code, he announced:

"This is how the message reads: 'Turks on board. Stopping Messina.—Winter.'"

For once the barrister was startled out of his usual quiet self-possession.

"Winter!" he almost screamed. "Is he there?"

A hundred mad questions coursed through his brain, but he realised that to attempt a long explanation by signals was not only out of the question, but could not fail to attract the attention of passengers on board the *Ganges*. This he did not desire to do. Quick as lightning, he decided that by some inexplicable means the Scotland Yard detective had reached Marseilles full of the knowledge that Dubois and the diamonds were *en route* to Sicily, and had also learnt that he, Brett, and the others were on board the *Blue-Bell*.

He had evidently taken the speediest means of reaching the island, and found himself on board the same ship as Grosjean and the Turks. Hence he had approached the captain with the request that the *Blue-bell* should be signalled.

"What shall we answer?" said Daubeney, breaking in upon the barrister's train of thought.

"Oh, say that the signal is fully understood."

Whilst the answering flags were being displayed Daubeney asked:

"What does it all mean?"

"It means," said Brett, "that if the *Blue-Bell* has another yard of speed in her engines we shall need it all. It perhaps will make no material difference in the long run, but as a mere matter of pride I should like to reach Palermo before Grosjean. If I remember rightly Palermo is six hours from Messina by rail. Can we do it?"

"Mac" was again consulted. Of course he would not commit himself.

"We will try ver-ry ha-r-rd," he said.

And with this resolve the *Blue-Bell* sped onwards through the sunlit sea until, late in the evening, the *Ganges* was hull down on her quarter.

Macpherson came on deck to take a last look at the P. and O.

"It will be a gr-reat race," he announced, "and I may have to kill a stoker. But——"

Then he dived below again.

The Message.

So rapidly did the *Blue-Bell* speed over the inland sea that as night fell upon the face of the waters on the second day out from Marseilles the look-out forrard announced "a light on the starboard bow," and Daubeney, after scrutinising it through his binoculars and consulting a chart, announced it to be the revolving light on Cape San Vito.

This discovery occasioned a slight alteration in the course. The *Blue-Bell* ran merrily on until the small hours of the morning, when everybody on board was suddenly awakened by the stoppage of the screw.

This is always a disturbing incident at sea when people are asleep. Travellers not inured to the incidents of ocean voyaging cannot help conjuring up vivid pictures of impending disaster.

It is useless to tell them that for the very reason the ship has slackened her speed it is obvious she is being navigated with care and watchfulness. Reason at such time is dethroned by the natural timidity of the unseen, and it is not surprising therefore that the passengers on board the *Blue-Bell* should one and all find some pretext to gain the deck in their eagerness to find out why the vessel had slowed down. The answer was a reassuring one. She had burnt a flare for a pilot, and quickly an answering gleam came from afar out of the darkness ahead.

The pilot was soon on board. He was an Italian, but, like most members of his profession doing business in those waters, he spoke French fluently.

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Brett asked him how long, with the north-easterly breeze then blowing, a small sailing vessel, such as a schooner-rigged fishing-smack, would take to reach Palermo from Marseilles.

The pilot seemed surprised at the question.

"It is a trip not often made, monsieur," he said. "Fishing vessels from Marseilles are frequently compelled to take shelter under the lee of Corsica or even Sardinia, but here—in Sicily—why should they come here?"

"Oh, I don't mean a schooner engaged in the fishing trade, but rather a small vessel chartered for pleasure, taking the place, as it were, of a private yacht."

"Ah," said the Italian, "that explains it. Well, Monsieur, with this breeze I should imagine they would set their course round by the north of Corsica in order to avoid beating through the Straits of Bonifacio. That would make the run about 650 knots, and a smart little vessel, carrying all her sails and properly ballasted, might reach Palermo in a few hours over three days."

"Thank you," said Brett. "Is Palermo a difficult port to make?"

"Oh, no, monsieur. There is deep water all round here, no shoals, and but few isolated rocks, which are all well known. The only thing to guard against is the changeful current. According to the state of the tide and the direction of the wind, sailing ships have to alter their course very considerably, for the currents round here are very strong and consequently most dangerous in calm weather."

Brett smiled.

"It would be an ignoble conclusion to the chase if the *Belles Sœurs* were wrecked with her valuable cargo. I most devoutly pray," he said to himself, "that the breezes and currents may combine to bring Dubois safely on shore. Then I think we can deal with him."

Soon after daybreak the *Blue-Bell*, after a momentary halt at the Customs Station, crept past the Castello a Mare, and amidst much gesticulation, accompanied by a torrent of volcanic Italian, she was tied up to a wharf in the Cala—the small inner harbour of the port.

Edith, who could not sleep since the advent of the pilot, made an early toilet and climbed to the bridge, whence she had a magnificent view of the dawn arising over the beautiful city that stands on the Conca d'Oro, or Golden Shell—the smiling and luxuriant plain that seems to be provided by Nature for man's habitation. It lies beyond a lovely bay, and is inclosed on three sides by lofty and precipitous mountains.

Naturally Fairholme was drawn to her side as a chip of steel to a magnet.

"We are certain to have a furious row here," he remarked when they had exhausted their superlative adjectives upon the splendid prospect opening up before their eyes.

"Why?" cried Edith wonderingly. "I understood that our present adventure may at any moment have exciting developments, but I do not see the association between the view and the possibility."

"It is this way," he answered. "I have not read a great deal, as you know, but I have always noticed in my limited way that wherever Nature is most lavish in her gifts, she seems to take a delight in setting people by the ears. Italy is a fine country, you know, yet there are more murders to the square inch there than in any other place on earth. Then again, it is likely that several armed policemen are at this moment chasing bandits among those hills over there," and he nodded towards the distant blue heights which looked so peaceful in the clear atmosphere, now brilliant with the rays of the rising sun.

Edith laughed. "Really, Bobby," she pouted, "you are becoming sentimental. I half expect to find you break out into verse."

"I can do that, too," he said, "though it is not my own. Hasn't Heber got a hymn which tells of a place where

Every prospect pleases
And only man is vile.

I forget the rest of it." Miss Talbot turned round rapidly upon him.

"Good gracious, Bobby, what is the matter with you? I never knew you in such a melting mood before?"

"How can I help it?" he half-whispered, laying his hand upon her shoulder. "We have never been together so much before in our lives. Don't you realise, Edith, what it means to us if Mr. Brett discovers those diamonds within the next few hours or days?"

He bent closer towards her and his hand passed from her shoulder round her neck. "When we return to England if you are willing we can be married within a week."

A bright flush suffused her beautiful face. She bent her head and was silent.

It is quite certain that Fairholme would have kissed her had not Daubeney shouted:

"Look here, you two, flirting on the bridge is strictly forbidden. You will demoralise the whole crew. Even the pilot cannot keep his eyes off you."

They laughed and giggled like a couple of children caught stealing gooseberries. Yet the incident and the words were fraught with a solemn significance which often came back to their minds in other days.

The party breakfasted on board and then set out to survey the hotels.

Brett's first care was to ascertain the scheduled hours of the train service between Messina and Palermo. To his joy he discovered that neither Winter nor the gang he was shadowing could possibly reach the city until a quarter to four in the afternoon. They decided in favour of the Hotel de France as being most modern in its appearance and centrally situated.

The next thing to do was to provide an efficient watch upon all sailing vessels entering the harbour, and here the pilot proved to be a valuable ally.

Brett explained to him that he was most anxious to meet some people who were coming from Marseilles on a fishing smack named the *Belles Sœurs, No. 107.*

It was possible, he explained, that both the number and the name might be obliterated, so he wished the pilot, or any helpers he might employ for the duty, to take particular note of all strange boats answering to the description given to him, and at once report their appearance.

This the man guaranteed to do. He said that it was quite impossible for a French-rigged smack to enter Palermo without attracting his notice.

As the daily remuneration fixed for his services was far beyond any sum he could earn as a pilot, he promptly set about his task with enthusiasm. He engaged two assistants to take turns in watching the harbour, and gave the barrister such assurances of devotion to duty that Brett felt quite satisfied that Dubois could not arrive in Palermo without his knowledge. Of course it was quite on the cards that some secluded creek along the coast might be preferred by the astute schemer as a point of debarkation, but that must be risked.

By approaching the police authorities and requesting their co-operation, and also using Grosjean and the Turks as a stalking-horse, Brett felt tolerably certain that the time would soon arrive when Dubois and he would stand face to face.

In making these manifold preparations the morning passed rapidly. The barrister insisted that his companions should go for a drive whilst he busied himself with the necessary details, and they should all meet together at the hotel for the mid-day meal. It was then that he singled out Sir Hubert for his personal share in the pursuit.

"You know Mr. Winter?" he said to the baronet.

"Yes, I remember him perfectly."

"In that case I wish you to go to the station and meet the 3.45 p.m. train on arrival. You will probably see the Turks and Grosjean, but pay no attention to them. Keep a bright

(*Continued on page* 284.)

"Held Apart," R. Norman Silver's Great New Story, Starts Next Tuesday]

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look out for Mr. Winter. Walk up quite openly and speak to him, and the probability is that should Grosjean have become suspicious of this Englishman who follows in the same track as himself, your presence on the platform will convince him that he was mistaken in imagining the slightest connection between Winter's journey and his own."

"That is good," said the major-general. "It would never have occurred to me. Any other commands?"

"None, save this," continued Brett, smiling at the old soldier's eagerness to obey implicitly any instructions given to him. "When you meet Winter, tell him, if possible, to so direct his movements as to find out Grosjean's destination, if it can be done without giving the Frenchman the slightest cause for uneasiness. Otherwise the matter is of no consequence. I have already interviewed the chief of police here, and it will only be a question of an hour's delay before the local detectives effectually locate the quarters occupied by Grosjean and the Turks."

Close Quarters.

Sir Hubert was all eagerness to set out upon his mission. He reached the station at least half an hour too soon. And anyone seeing him there would readily admit that the barrister could not have chosen an agent less guileful in appearance. The very cut of his clothes, the immaculate character of his white spats bespoke the elderly British gentleman.

At last the train arrived. The vast majority of its passengers were Sicilian peasants or business men returning to Palermo from the interior of the island. To Sir Hubert's delight he at once caught sight of Grosjean and the Turks, whom, of course, he quickly identified as the loungers on the tower of the Chateau d'If.

It occurred to him that there was a remote chance of recognition by Grosjean, so he busied himself for an instant in seeming scrutiny of the bookstall until they had passed. A little further down the platform he caught sight of Inspector Winter, that worthy individual being engaged in a fiercely unintelligible controversy with an Italian porter as to the possession of his portmanteau.

Sir Hubert hurried forward and seized the amazed policeman by his hand, wringing it warmly. To tell the truth, Winter did not know for a moment who it was that accorded him such a cordial greeting, for, as it subsequently transpired, the policeman was not aware of Sir Hubert's journey to Marseilles, nor did he guess that Edith was with him.

"Held Apart," R. Norman Silver's Great New Story, Starts Next Tuesday.

The stolid detective, however, quickly recovered himself, and his first words were:

"Did Mr. Brett fully understand my signal?"

"I think so," said the other; "but he will tell you all about that afterwards. At present he wishes you to ascertain, if possible, Grosjean's intended residence."

Mr. Winter smiled with a peculiar air of superiority affected by Scotland Yard.

"Oh, that is easy," he condescended to explain. "I have been talking to him."

"You don't say so!"

"Yes, I have. My French is bad, and his English is worse, but he understands that I am in the wholesale grocery trade. I have come to Palermo to buy currants!"

"Most extraordinary! How very clever of you!"

Mr. Winter drew himself up with an air of professional pride.

"That is nothing, sir," he said. "We often make queer acquaintanceships in the way of business. But Grosjean is a smart chap. He eyed me curiously when he happened to hear that I was the fifth passenger who wished to leave the steamer at Messina, so I took the bull by the horns and made myself useful to him in the matter of getting his baggage out of the hold."

"Marvellous!" gasped Sir Hubert.

"The upshot of it was that he gave me some advice about currants. We stayed in the same hotel at Messina, travelled together in the train, and I am going to put up at the Campo Santo Hotel, where he will stay with the Turks."

Meanwhile the subject of their conversation had quitted the station, and Sir Hubert's respect for Mr. Winter's powers as a sleuth hound yielded to anxiety lest the slippery Frenchman might vanish once and for all.

"Hadn't we better follow him?" he suggested.

Mr. Winter winked knowingly. "Don't be anxious, sir. He wants to be seen in my company. He believes I am here for trading purposes, and the association will be useful to him."

Nevertheless the baronet was glad to find that Mr. Winter's confidence was not misplaced, when, ten minutes later, he again encountered the Frenchman and the Turks at the door of the Campo Santo, a cheap and popular hotel near the square that forms the centre of Palermo.

The detective was eminently suited for the *rôle* he now filled.

"Ah, monsoo," he cried, with boisterous good humour, "permittez—moi introducer un friend of mine, Monsoo Smeeth, de Londres, you know. Je ne savez pas les noms de votre companiongs, but they are très bons camarades, je suis certain."

Grosjean was most complaisant.

"It ees von grand plaisir, m'sieu," he said, whilst the Turks gravely bowed their acknowledgments.

The upshot of this extraordinary meeting was that when Mr. Winter had secured a room and the party had ordered dinner, the six men set out for a stroll through the town.

Sir Hubert strove hard to so manœuvre their ramble that they should pass the Hotel de France, and perchance conie under the astonished eyes of Brett and the others.

But this amiable design was frustrated by Grosjean's eagerness to visit the post-office, which lay in a different direction.

One of the Turks, none other than Hussein-ul-Mulk, spoke English fairly well, and he puzzled the old baronet considerably when the latter was called upon to answer his questions.

Yet the situation passed off well. Grosjean came out of the post-office, apparently without having obtained any missives—a letter, of course, could not possibly await him—and suggested that they should wander towards the harbour.

Sir Hubert strongly recommended the spectacular beauty of the street where the Hotel de France lay, but Grosjean politely insisted that he wished to make some inquiries at the shipping office, and Mr. Winter backed him up, being ignorant of the baronet's real motive. There was nothing to do but yield gracefully.

They walked along the Corso Vittorio Emanuele. Sir Hubert, fresh with memories of his morning's drive with a guide, pointed out the chief buildings, becoming sadly mixed up in the names of some of them.

Still, this was a safer topic than his previous conversation with Hussein-ul-Mulk, so he persevered gamely.

They soon reached the quay. Sir Hubert became almost incoherent with agitation when they passed the *Blue-Bell* and came into full view of Edith, Jack, Fairholme, and Daubeney, who happened to leave the hotel shortly before five o'clock in order to visit the yacht and secure a good cup of tea.

Brett refused to accompany them, on the ground that his Italian scout, the pilot, might ring news at any hour, and he must remain within immediate call. It was a supreme moment when Grosjean halted and called general attention to the smart-looking vessel and the tea-drinkers.

Sir Hubert keenly examined the top of the funnel, and tried simultaneously to yawn and light a cigar. In the result, he nearly choked himself. Mr. Winter, somewhat more prepared for emergencies, endeavoured to interest Grosjean in the wonderful clearness of the water.

But Hussein-ul-Mulk and his two sedate friends suddenly betrayed a keen interest in Fairholme.

(*Continued on page 287.*)

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Throat Deafness.

The close relation between throat ailments and chronic Deafness is shown by the fact that out of every 1,000 Deaf patients applying to the Drouet Institute, an average of 234 have some form of nose and throat complaint. The Editor of "The Journal for the Deaf" pursues this subject still further in a special article, and also dwells upon the Cure of Deafness by the Drouet Method of external application. One of the cures of throat Deafness described is the case of Mr. E. Terry, of 4 Veldt Villas, Ashcroft Road, Cirencester. In this case the Deafness was associated with catarrh of the throat. In response to an enquiry by the Editor, Mr. Terry wrote as follows:—"I followed the Drouet Treatment, as you recommended, and can now hear well with both ears, which I could not do before." Those who are interested in this subject can obtain a free copy of the "Journal for the Deaf" by addressing the Secretary, Drouet Institute, 10 Marble Arch, London, W. The "Journal" also contains a Special Report Form, by means of which anyone can obtain free advice as to the treatment of Deafness and Ear, Nose, and Throat Diseases. The Editor, however, advises patients, whenever possible, to attend the Institute for a personal examination.

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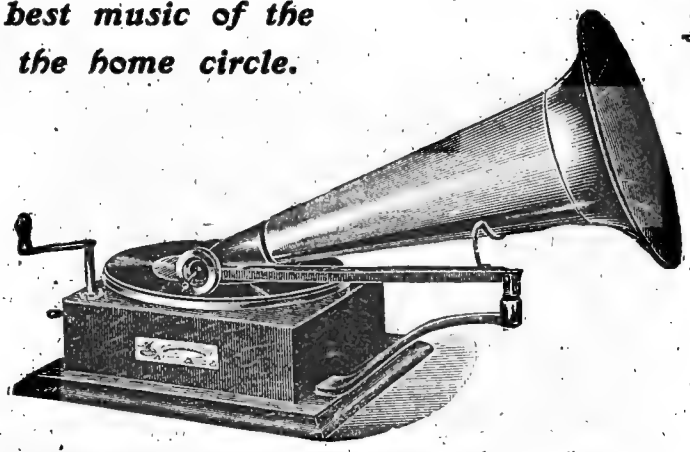

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(Signed) Sarah Bernhardt."

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When they last met the earl on the tower of the Château d'If they were so engrossed in the object of their visit to Marseilles that he had passed them unnoticed.

But now, looking steadily at him—for Fairholme was seated facing them, and was striving to maintain the semblance of an animated chat with Edith—there came to the Turks a memory, each instant becoming more definite, of an exciting scene in the Rue Barbette, and the opportune arrival of a stalwart young Englishman, backed up by a couple of gendarmes.

Hussein-ul-Mulk's swarthy countenance reddened with suspicious anger.

He drew Grosjean on one side and whispered something to him. The Frenchman started violently.

"They have recognised you, Bobby!" murmured the quick-witted Edith. "Oh, why didn't we remain with Mr. Brett!"

There is no knowing what might have happened had not Fate stepped in to decide in dramatic fashion the important issues at stake.

Whilst Grosjean and the Turk were still conferring in stealthy tones, and the English people endeavoured to keep up an appearance of complete unconcern, a tramp steamer swung round the corner of the mole that protects the harbour.

In tow, with sails trimly furled and six people standing on her small deck—a lady and gentleman and four sailors—was the *Belles Sœurs*, fishing-smack No. 107, from Marseilles.

Instantly a watcher, otherwise unperceived, ran off from the quay at top speed towards the Hotel de France.

Mr. Winter Makes an Arrest.

Grosjean, the Turks, Edith, Fairholme—each and every member of the two parties on the wharf and on the deck of the *Blue-Bell*—momentarily forgot the minor excitement of the situation in view of this unexpected apparition.

"There they are! Come quickly!" cried Grosjean.

He ran further along the quay followed by the Turks.

"Quick, Bobby! Oh, Jack, do something! Mr. Brett could not foresee this, though he seemed to have an inspiration that kept him in the hotel. What can we do? Dubois and the girl will know you at once! Jack, shouldn't you keep out of sight?—go below—go and fetch Mr. Brett Oh, dear, this is dreadful!"

Thus did Edith, for once yielding to feminine irresolution, appeal to her lover and brother, vainly seeking to discover the best line of action to follow in this disastrous circumstance, for she well knew that the diamonds must now be in the personal possession of Dubois.

It was a golden opportunity to recover the stolen gems. If once he eluded the grasp of his pursuers after landing they might—probably would—secure him, but not the diamonds.

Daubeney, now purple with perplexity, and Fairholme, swearing softly under his breath, sprang from the deck to the low wall of the quay. Almost unconsciously they joined Sir Hubert and Mr. Winter.

Edith followed them. She glanced at her brother. He was gazing curiously, vindictively, at the two figures on the deck of the *Belles Sœurs*.

There was a fierce gleam in his eyes, a set expression in his closed lips, a nervous twitching at the corners of his mouth, that betokened the over-powering emotions of the moment.

With a woman's intuition Edith realised that no power on earth, no consideration of expediency, would restrain him from laying violent hands on Dubois at the first possible opportunity.

She knew there must be a struggle, in which Grosjean and the Turks, perhaps the four sailors, would participate. They might use knives and fire-arms, whereas the Englishmen were unarmed.

So she ran back on board the yacht and cried to the Scottish engineer:

"Oh, Mr. Macpherson! Please come with some of your men! There may be a fight on the wharf, and Mr. Daubeney and the others will be outnumbered!"

Macpherson for once forgot his cautiousness. There was none of the characteristic slowness of the Scottish nation in his manner or language as he yelled down the fore-hatch: "Tumble up, there! Some dirty Eye-talians are goin' to hammer the boss. Bring along a monkey-wrench or the first thing to hand. Shar-r-p's the wo-r-rd!"

Forthwith there appeared from the hatch-way a miscellaneous mob of seamen, firemen, and stewards. Following Edith and Macpherson, they ran along the quay.

Already there was something unusual in progress. Loungers by the harbour, perceiving a disturbance, were running towards the scene of action.

A solitary Italian policeman, swaggering jauntily over the paved roadway, was suddenly startled out of his self-complacency.

"*Caramba!*" he shouted. Drawing his sabre, he broke into a run.

For matters had developed with melodramatic suddenness. Casting off the steamer's tow-rope, the *Belles Sœurs* swung alongside the wharf much more easily and quickly than did the friendly vessel by whose aid she had so soon reached Palermo.

Both steamer and smack had already been searched by the Customs' officers who boarded them in the quarantine station, and the reason that the schooner had not been earlier sighted from the shore was found in the mere chance that she was rendered invisible by close proximity to her bigger companion.

The instant that the fishing-boat was tied to the wharf Mlle. Beaucaire sprang ashore. Grosjean, breathless and excited, was there to greet her.

But the greeting between father and daughter was not very cordial. The innkeeper seemed to be dumfounded with surprise at her early arrival.

Dubois followed more leisurely.

He took no notice of Grosjean, and appeared to be looking about for a cab. Two of the sailors were handing up a couple of portmanteaux from the deck.

Hussein-ul-Mulk and the two other Turks, unable to restrain their excitement, crowded round the pink-and-white Frenchman, jabbering volubly, but Mademoiselle and her father moved some slight distance away.

At this juncture Mr. Winter strode resolutely forward, seized Dubois firmly by the shoulder, and said:

"Henri Dubois! In the name of the King of England I arrest you for the murder of——"

The detective's words were stopped by a blow.

A wild struggle promptly ensued. The man turned upon him like a tiger and the Turks joined in. Grosjean, too, ran back to take a hand in the fray. Fairholme, Sir Hubert, Daubeney, and Talbot flung themselves on the would-be rescuers, and the four French sailors of the *Belles Sœurs* leapt ashore to assist their passenger in this unlooked-for attack. Frantic yells and oaths came from the confused mob, and knives were drawn.

Talbot had but one desire in life—to get his fingers on Dubois' throat. He had almost reached him, for Winter clung to his prey with bull-dog tenacity, when an astounding thing happened.

The Frenchman's handsome moustaches fell off, and beneath the clever make-up on her face were visible the boldly handsome features of La Belle Chasseuse, now distorted by rage and fear.

"You fool!" yelled Talbot to Winter. "You have let him escape!"

Tearing himself from the midst of the fight he was just in time to see the female figure, which he now knew must be Dubois masquerading in his mistress' clothes, jumping into a cab and driving off towards the Corso Vittorio Emanuele.

"Come on, Fairholme!" he cried. "He cannot get away! Here comes an empty carriage!"

But now Macpherson and his allies had reached the scene. Using a "monkey-wrench or the first thing to hand," they placed the Turks, Grosjean, and the crew of the *Belles Sœurs* on the casualty list.

(*To be concluded shortly.*)

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IN CONFIDENCE

Conducted by CYNTHIA.

[In this page are answered any letters from readers dealing with affairs of the heart, tangles in domestic life, or points of etiquette. All communications must be addressed to Miss Cynthia Hamilton, c/o the Editor of Short Stories.*]*

The Broken Promise.

Six months ago "Mary" and her lover were looking into a jeweller's shop. The girl took a fancy to a brooch she saw there, and the young man promptly replied, "Well, you shall have it some day." Since then nothing has been seen or heard of the promised brooch. Do I think "Mary" should remind the sweetheart of his promise, and was it an honourable thing for the man to promise the present and not keep his word?

* * * * *

Perhaps the young man really hoped at the time that he would be able to buy the brooch, and since that has had pecuniary difficulty. Many people, out of sheer generosity and good nature, indiscreetly promise things, and when the time comes to fulfil their promises, are absolutely unable to do so. They are not exactly dishonourable—that is too strong a word—but are very foolish people.

* * * * *

If you know that there was no pecuniary trouble at the bottom of your lover's conduct, he may have simply forgotten to buy the brooch, in which case a hint from you could well be put forward. But do not allow your desire for the brooch to lead you to offend him.

To Become a Singer.

So, "G. R." you are a young lady who wishes to become a professional singer, and would like to know how to go about it. Well, in the first instance, have you a voice? I know the life of a singer, with all its glitter and applause, is a very fascinating one, and it is delightful to be able to give one's life to the divine art.

* * * * *

But one cannot be made a singer, even with the very best training in the world. Go to a musical expert, and ask him to give you a candid opinion on your voice. Your organist or choir-master could, perhaps, do this. If the verdict of two or three people is favourable, then take lessons, elementary ones first, advanced ones later.

* * * * *

Do not trust too much to the good opinion of friends and relations. There is a tendency amongst them to either overwhelm one with praise or discourage one by ridicule. A sane judgment is seldom to be got from intimate friends. Get the opinion of a stranger, who has no interest in the matter, and abide by it.

* * * * *

Remember the path before one who seeks to win success in such an art as singing is one of the most difficult. You must give up hours and hours daily to practice, and your diet, exercise, and general habits would have to be largely regulated for you. But a good voice overcomes all those obstacles, if one possesses it, as is evident in the case of Miss Clara Butt, once as obscure perhaps as yourself, but now one of the greatest singers of the age.

A Domestic Complication.

Here is a little question of etiquette with which many of us may at some time or another find ourselves confronted. "G. H." has been invited to a friend's house—a young married man—to have tea, and to spend an evening. The wife is a young and delicate woman, who keeps one servant. At a certain time in the evening the servant is suddenly taken ill and has to go to bed. The wife finds that she is unable to prepare supper herself. How should the various parties act?

* * * * *

"G. H." should perceive the difficulty the household were placed in, and excuse himself. To appear to be expecting the hostess to put herself to a lot of trouble on his account would be tactless. He should invent an excuse—which might not perhaps be truthful, but still it would be one of those little fibs which are pardonable.

* * * * *

If the hostess really intended to provide supper, I think she should do so, assuming she was not absolutely incapable of it. If so, then the husband should apologise to "G. H." for the trouble, adding, "We had so hoped you would have supper with us"—a hint which "G. H." could quite well take in good part.

Business Matters.

"L." is courting a girl. She has not inquired anything as to his business pursuits or position. Is it his duty to make her acquainted with those things?

Certainly there should be complete confidence between sweethearts on such a subject. I always think a man who may one day marry a girl should lose no opportunity of telling her his business experiences. It is only right that she should know them, and be interested.

The Prosaic Letter Writer.

What is to be done with a man who cannot write a love-letter? This trouble comes from "Emma," whose suitor writes to her almost daily, but very rarely hints at a word of love. She thinks this means a coolness in his relations with her. When he meets her, however, he is as affectionate as possible.

* * * * *

Well, "Emma," it is far better that the young man should display his affection in practice than write letters describing it. How many love-letters are really genuine? I incline to think your lover must be a really straight-forward, honest fellow, who has no unnecessary gush about him. A loving word or two in writing is, I know, very delightful, but it does not, after all, prove the lover to be any the more genuine.

Visiting a Sweetheart's Home.

The trouble of "Diana U." is, "Should she invite the man of her choice to her home, when he has not invited her to his, which is in another town?"

* * * *

Yes, certainly, if your parents or friends are agreeable to meeting him. There is no rule that I know of which lays down who should first visit the other's home. It is largely decided by circumstances. Certainly it is generally more desirable that a girl's parents should know her sweetheart than the other way about. Many men postpone until the last possible moment the introduction of their sweethearts at home, especially when there are sisters in question. I know how unenviable is the position at first of a girl at her *fiancé's* home. It is not, however, usually the case with the man.

Cynthia

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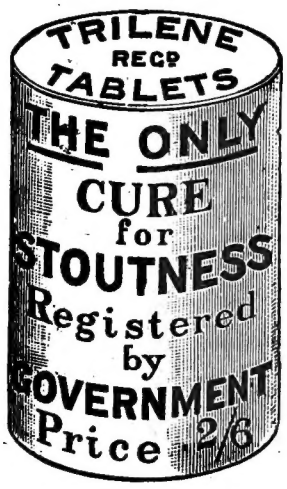

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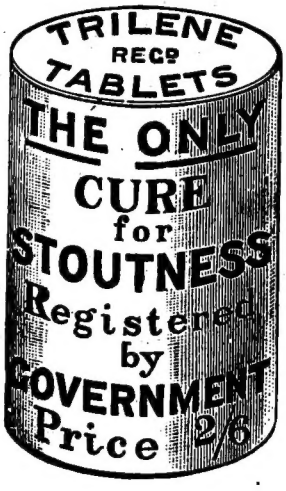

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SAMPLES OF TESTIMONIALS.

"87 Alexandra Road, Norwich, October 19th, 1896.

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"Yours faithfully, J. R. CANHAM."

COUNTESS SECKENDORFF, of Berlin, writes: "The Tablets greatly benefited me personally, and I am recommending them to friends."

MISS CHATTERTON, 7 Salisbury Villas, Banstead, Surrey, says: "I weighed 12st. 8lb., but am now 11st., and getting much better."

Nurse CROUCHER, at Mrs. Bennett's, 14 Buckleigh Road, Streatham, says: "I lost 9lb. from the box I took."

Mrs. D. BURTON, of Silverleigh, Tunbridge, writes: "I am very pleased with difference in size, my friends all telling me how much thinner I am getting."

Miss NORTHLEDGE, The Laurels, Risebolm Road, Lincoln, says: "The Tablets reduced me 1st., so that I am cured."

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Extract from *The Lady*, September 3rd, 1896: "Many stout persons have suffered untold agonies in unavailing efforts to reduce their bulk, either by means of severe dieting, or by taking more or less deleterious drugs; but all these pains would have been saved if they had only invested in a box of the wonderful Trilene Tablets, which are quite harmless, containing neither mercury, arsenic, nor any other mineral poison, and which are an unfailing cure for obesity."

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Mr. MCLEOD, 44 Calside, Paisley, writes: "I have been cured. If you want to know my weight now, it is 10st.; reduced 1st. 8lb., and I am quite content."

COUNT EHRENWAUD, of Listorp, Sweden, writes, 9th Oct., 1899: "The person who took Tablets lost 18lb. during the cure.

Mr. GIBBS, 147 Richmond Park, Kimberworth, Rotherham, says: "Since I began with them they have reduced me 2st. 3lb., and I am pleased to say I am a great deal better in health and in every way."

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Mrs. MARY WILLIAMS, of Old Yard, near Redol, Bagillt, Wales, writes Nov. 22nd, 1898: "Your Tablets reduced me 2st., and have benefited me greatly."

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Mrs. PEARCE, Armstrong Road, Benwell: "Reduced from 12st. to 9¼st., and do not get any heavier."

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Countess FURSTENBERG, of Germany, writes: "They act speedily and well."

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Mrs. WEAVER, of Greenpits Villa, Ross, Hereford, writes: "I am reduced from 13st. 8lb. to 11st. You may use this if you like."

Mrs. CROSSLEY, of Rose Hill, Torver, nr. Coniston, says: "There is a very decided diminution of fat. I am delighted, and cannot speak too highly in praise of Tablets. My heart is better, and I can breathe so much easier. You may refer to me as often as you like."

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